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Inside

CAPTURE LIGHT AND MAGIC IN PHOTOSHOP

CREATE CASTLES WITH HISTORICAL REFERENCE

PAINT IMAGINATIVE SCALY CREATURES

Interview
TODD McFARLANE

Q&A SPECIAL! HOW TO DRAW WITCHES, DRAGONS, DEMONS AND MORE!

Welcome. . .
to forward-looking art

Here in the UK we're readying ourselves to welcome the onset of spring, bringing with it warmer weather and lighter days. As we draw back the curtains and shake off our winter hibernation woolies, it's a great time to take stock of our past achievements and look forward to new beginnings and opportunities.

Most of the time, life can seem so hectic and relentless and I know it's hard to find a moment even to read this magazine, let alone start a painting, but maybe our Todd McFarlane interview may give you a chance to consider something new? While Todd still creates art himself, the interview really focuses on his art direction work and the continuing legacy of Spawn. It's about an artist constantly diversifying his skills to get his art to the masses. It's an interesting read, which starts on page 44.
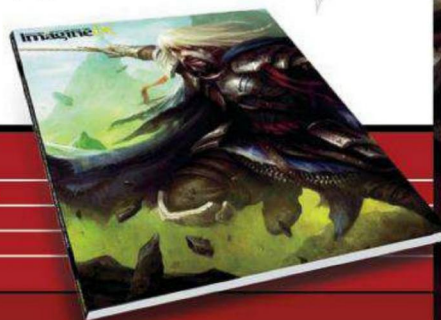
We also spoke with artist Jeff Simpson. I've long had Jeff's gallery bookmarked when in need of inspiration or some soothing eye-candy to take me away from endless emails. His work is so dark yet inviting and I think it has a unique feel to it. Take a look on page 56. Maybe it'll get you thinking about trying out a different art style yourself?

If you want your work to be considered for ImagineFX please turn to page 19 for details of how to submit your art, or visit **www.imaginefx. com/submit** for the full list of requirements. Who knows? Maybe gracing these pages may lead to a new commission or offer or work… now that's something to look forward to!

Claire

Claire Howlett, Editor
claire@imaginefx.com

Our special cover for subscribers this issue.

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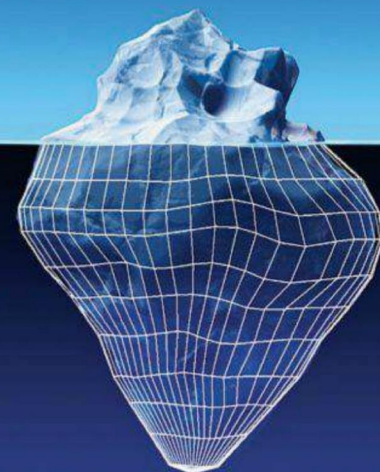
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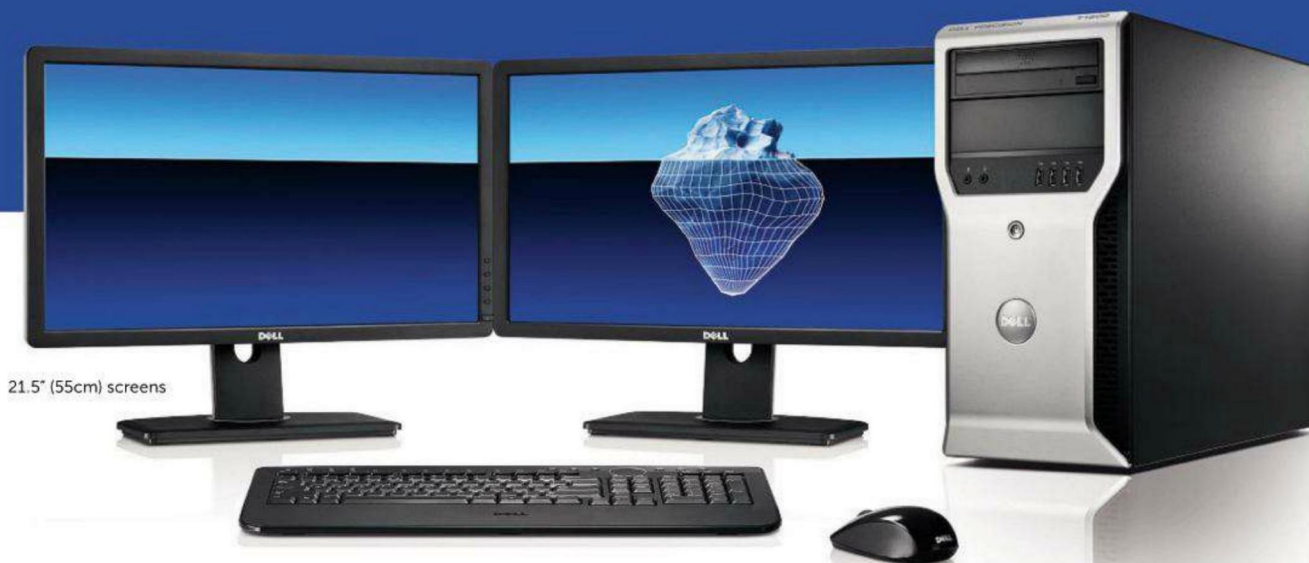
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In progress

Daarken cuts back on the cliches to paint our cover

Daarken produced a series of sketches based on the ImagineFX cover template, each expressing a different knightly pose. The second pose fits the cover best: open and action packed, it draws in the viewer. With the pose established we ask Daarken to work up the character's details.

The initial idea of a knight in shining armour develops into a more original mix of styles: part barbarian, part knight, part Nordic warrior. Daarken's character is beginning to take shape. The only dilemma is to remove the chunky war hammer that makes our logo unreadable...
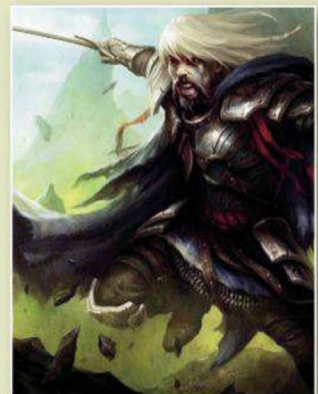
Daarken recently bought a sword and this inspires the character's new weapon and acts as a reference. With some hours spent detailing the hero's face, his mix of plate armour and chain mail, and shaggy hair style, our knight-cum-Viking is complete.

ImagineFX
Cover artist

Illustrator, concept artist and owner of a real sword, Daarken's depiction of fantasy knights are beautiful and epic, which suits us just fine...

Daarken

COUNTRY: US
SOFTWARE: Photoshop
WEB: www.daarken.com

One of the world's top concept artists, Daarken has worked on projects as varied as Warhammer Online to classic Dungeons & Dragons. Even though he's a renowned illustrator, Daarken still feels in awe of his schoolboy heroes: a recent collaboration with Todd McFarlane on Kingdoms of Amalur left him giddy.

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Art legend Todd McFarlane

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THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

🇺🇸 Laurel D Austin

LOCATION: US
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EMAIL: ldaustinart@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, ZBrush, Maya

Maybe it's because she comes from Canada that Laurel was always destined to be an artist. "It's all those dragons and monsters we have up here," she explains. The margin sketches of every school notebook Laurel's ever had would certainly back this up.

Having attended Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, she secured a job at Splash Damage in London. "There I was the principal character concept artist on the game BRINK," she says. "I've since moved to California, US, and work as a concept artist at Blizzard Entertainment."

1 HEADLESS HORSEMAN "Blizzard's characters have been a fun way to exercise my composition muscles. Here the idea was to draw the viewer's eyes away from the corners. They tend to attract attention, so you have to give people excuses not to look there."

2 HOGGER "Emphasising character in paintings is nearly always the most fun part for me. Paying a lot of attention to faces and what they're supposed to be expressing will always make your character more believable."

3 BRINK IMAGES "BRINK was an amazing project to work on, and I'm very glad I got the chance to help set a style that ended up being so distinct."

4 THE EGG THIEF "I wanted to capture a moment of tension in a story. I've centred the composition around the interaction between the two main figures (the middle griffon and the egg-holding troll) and used the lines of the elements surrounding them to guide the gaze of the viewer in concentric circles around the image."

ARTIST OF THE MONTH
Congratulation Laurel, you've won copies of Exotique 6 and Character Modeling 3. To find out more about these two indispensable art resources, go to www.ballisticpublishing.com.

1
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2
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3
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Artist crit

Paco Rico Torres is knocked out by Laurel's technique

"Composition, expressiveness, light, colour, depth... everything is great in this image. Special mention to how the feathers of the birds are depicted with just a few brush strokes. Superb!"

🇦🇺 Ryan Lee Jones

LOCATION: Australia
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EMAIL: raven_1303@hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

A fan of Disney, Studio Ghibli and popular anime Dragonball Z, Ryan thought it prudent to put his hours of TV watching to good use, and started designing characters as a hobby when he was 16. "I was halfway through my studies," he says, "when I had the privilege of studying under illustrator Patrick J Jones." (It just so happens we feature Patrick and his studio on page 26.) Thus Ryan ventured into digital art.

Other then Patrick, his biggest inspirations have been Randis Albion, Guangjian Huang, Stanley Lau and Marek Okon.

1 UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN "I designed this picture for my little sister Catherine who passed away recently. I wanted to paint a world that has a serene feel, a harmonious place that can be her sanctuary. Finding the right colours to use can be a difficult choice, but I think the colours I used match the peacefulness of the design."

2 SKY TRAVELERS "The idea for this design was to create an image that shows people of different origins travelling and exploring a unique world together. I tried a few different layouts before deciding to get a clear angle of each character and the world below. My favourite thing about illustration is creating a world where I want to escape to with an untold story."

3 LOCATED IN THE NEON CITY "I first had an idea of an elite bounty hunter who locates his target hidden in the neon city in an action scene, but I decided to make this design more mysterious and leave it to the imagination. I think a lot of artwork can become overcomplicated. I enjoyed experimenting with light and shadow while painting this design. I usually experiment with multiple light sources."
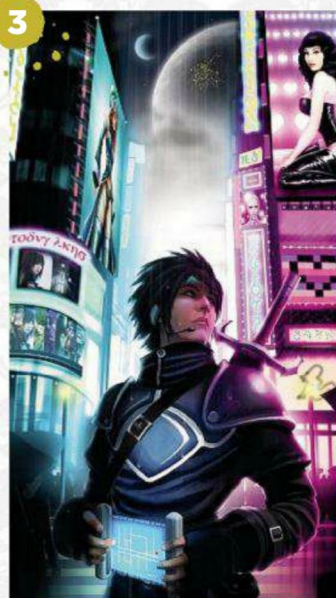
1 🇺🇸 **Naomi Baker**
LOCATION: US
WEB: naomiful.blogspot.com
EMAIL: naomiful@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

What's an East Coast child, obsessed with Wildcats, Jim Lee's X-Men and Gen 13 comic art, to do? Become just as hooked on Capcom art like Street Fighter, Dark Stalkers and Rival Schools – obviously!

"I am, you may have guessed, a huge gamer," says Naomi, "but art is what keeps me hungry day to day." In fact, it's the digital format of videogames that got her into digital painting, rather than comics. "Now I'm a freelance illustrator in videogames, commercial and motion pictures," says Naomi, "doing things from advertising to concept art."

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"Naomi's best work feeds off her love of games and comics, particularly when it comes to gesture. Her drawing skills and line art are the building blocks of her captivating paintings, typified by her dashing, scarf-clad skeleton."
Ian Dean,
Deputy Editor

1 FUNNY SKELETON "This is a Diablo skeleton fan art. There's something funny about those classic skeleton goons that I had to portray."

2 UNCONDITIONAL "This personal piece was for a time where I outwardly absolutely denied that faith and God existed. At the same time, secretly, maybe even unknown to myself, it was something I needed most."

3 THRALL "A study of Thrall from World of Warcraft."

4 PISCES "There was a character of the week on ConceptArt.org that I participated in that had to do with the Zodiac. I'm a Pisces and this is what I came up with. I loved working with those girly colours for once!"

Arthur Haas

LOCATION: Netherlands
WEB: www.ahaas.nl
EMAIL: erahaas@yahoo.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Alchemy

Born in Holland in 1969, Arthur moved to Amsterdam in 1990 and fell in love with the city. "As with most slightly older artists," he says, "I didn't start out digitally. In fact, I didn't start out as an artist at all!" Arthur's career began with photography. But the "insane images" in his head were no good to him in the photographic medium, and painting in acrylics took too long, so he settled on working in Photoshop.

Nowadays Arthur uses a combination of digital and traditional media. "There's something about water-based paints that's just not possible to achieve digitally, just as there's no analogue equivalent to being able to use layers, custom brushes and undoing what I don't like."

1 DUSTSTORM "This one received an excellence award in this year's Exposé 9. It started life as a custom brushes experiment and me trying out those incredible mixed brushes in CS5."

2 LUDICROUS II "I began this image in Alchemy just to get an idea for composition. I added colour and detail to the main elements using Photoshop. I wanted the scene to have an alien feel. The ship was painted with some weird custom brushes."

3 LUDICROUS V "This also started as an Alchemy warm-up with potential. The ship came out very quickly and once I added the cool blue pools it all came together for me. I imagined some coral-like trees the size of mountains dotting the landscape."

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"Arthur's use of organic forms has been cleverly constructed to capture a great sense of space and depth. Strong dark foreground colours and light background colours have secured a fantastic distance to this exotic array of worlds."
Daniel Vincent,
Art Editor

FXPosé submissions to: fxpose@imaginefx.com

1

Andreas "Luggen" Karlsson

LOCATION: Sweden
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EMAIL: andreas@unlitart.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Andreas is employed as a 3D artist at Tarsier Studios, and has created content for the Little Big Planet games. "In my spare time I like to work with all sorts of things, from paintings to sculpture and model building," he says. "When it comes to making digital paintings I often base them on paper sketches, but I also like to start off with abstract shapes using custom brushes and see where it takes me."

1 **RAPTURE** "A self-portrait that's based on a paper sketch I picked up when all the talk about the rapture started circulating the internet. Not sure how much this has to do with the rapture but hey, it was fun nonetheless."

2 **DIZZY** "An interpretation of the Dizzy character from the Guilty Gear series. It was supposed to be the concept for a 3D character, but I never got around to make it. Perhaps I will in the future."

2

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"There's a lot of movement and flexibility in Andreas' self-portrait. With a few deft brush strokes he's managed to portray his demonic alter ego looking full of life and having a cheeky sense of fun."
Ian Dean,
Deputy Editor

🇺🇸 **Marc Scheff**
LOCATION: US
WEB: www.marcscheff.com
EMAIL: marc@marcscheff.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Painter

Marc freelances from a spacious oil painter's studio in the loft of his Brooklyn apartment. "My day is a mix of digital painting, teaching and writing," he says. "I went digital because I have a computer science degree, and it just felt natural to use a familiar tool to make art."

Still using traditional bits and pieces in my work, he "won't ever give up natural media" for his personal creative explorations. "I've focused my last five years in games, and would like to expand to film and publishing next," he tells us.

1 JET BIKE GETAWAY "I created this at the 2010 Illustration Master Class (IMC), and it was featured in the ImagineFX IMC special that year. It was really thrilling to see all the different takes on this project. You can see all the final pieces at www.bit.ly/imc2010."

2 SPICEFLOW "Another piece for the IMC, this time for 2011's event, and once again I made it into the ImagineFX IMC special that year. I had a lot of fun with this one. I used some ZBrush to model parts of the cave, and worked with Iain McCaig on some of the figures and lighting."

1

🍁 **Hanna Sandvig**
LOCATION: Canada
WEB: www.hanna-sandvig.com
EMAIL: sandvig.hanna@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

"I'm a mummy by day and a freelance illustrator by night," reveals the unassuming superhero artist Hanna. She's also self-taught and takes that very seriously. "It means I always want to learn, and I'm constantly working to improve."

Working digitally for about seven years, Hanna has been drawing since her "pudgy little toddler hand" could grip a crayon. "It was mostly fairy princesses then... and not much has changed," she says. Drawn to art that's imaginative and hopeful, Hanna's main aim is to create art that will make people smile.

1 CLOCKWORK BIRD "So the story for this one is that she's off on some sort of airship adventure, but had to leave her sweetheart behind. He's made this little clockwork bird and sent it off to find her. To say that he misses her."

2 KITTY "This ended up being a learning piece for me. You know when you decide to paint the best picture you've ever painted? And then you realise that you don't know how to paint a decent background. Or anything in the dark... or fur."

3 STEAMY "I love steampunk art a lot. But I have to say that there's rather a lack of cute and girly steampunk art out there. This is my contribution to help with that."
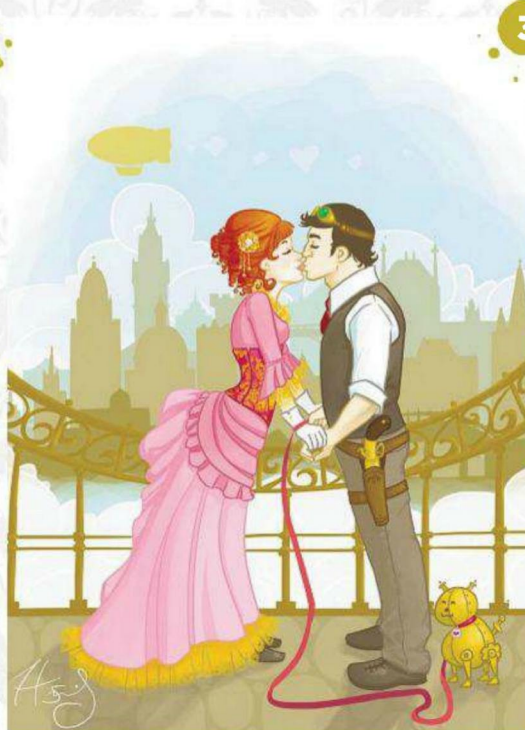
IMAGINEFX CRIT

"What I like about the diversity in the art styles of Hanna's work is that it shows she clearly steps out of her artistic comfort zone in an effort to learn new art skills – as she explains herself in the description for Kitty. A lot of artists could learn from this."

Claire Howlett,
Editor

Andrei Sitari

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SOFTWARE: Photoshop

"Even though I was drawing since I can remember, funnily enough, YouTube got me seriously into art," says Andrei. It all started back in October 2008 for him. "When I uploaded my first speed drawing video, I then joined deviantART and noticed people making digital art, which I liked a lot, so I bought myself a tablet."

Since then, digital art has been a daily habit that he's stuck to. "I like to call myself an art student, but I want to become a well-known illustrator, and work in the animation industry."

1 FOREST GUARD "This piece was done for a contest on deviantART. Here I introduced space to my artwork. I tried to work as much as I could with shape, colour and values. I learned a lot from creating this piece."

2 GIRL WITH A BIRD "This is a portrait for a personal book project. The bird on the shoulder is just a random colourful bird."

3 ANISTER "This is a concept piece from the same book project – it's the main character. Here I've tried playing with colours and messing around with the background."
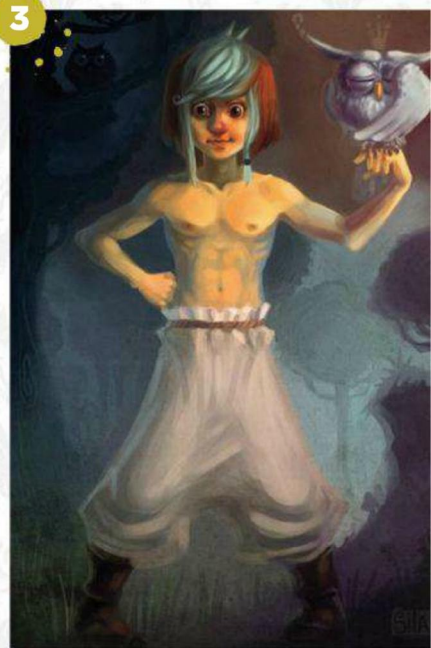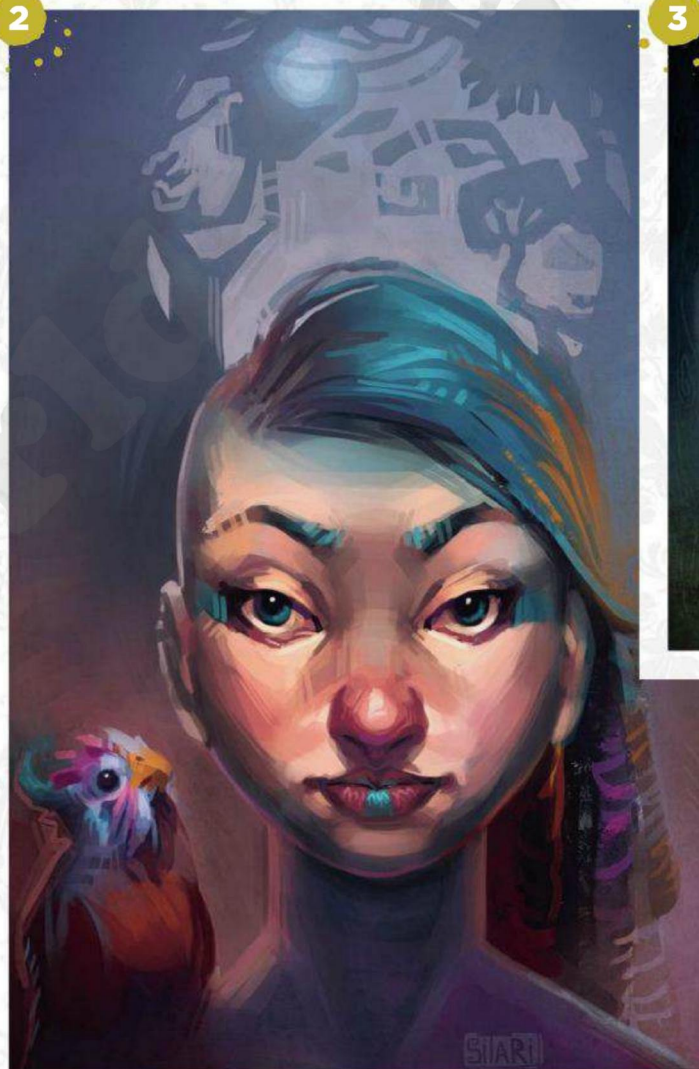
🇺🇸 **Ed Binkley**
LOCATION: US
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EMAIL: mail@edbinkley.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Ed's been a professional artist and illustrator for three decades, and recent accomplishments include a Gold Medal Award in the Spectrum book series, commissioned work from Lucasfilm and a painting commissioned by George Lucas.

"I've taught in the art department at Madison College since 1995 where I served as director of the Concept Development and Animation Program since 2000," the stalwart artist says. "In fact, I studied originally as a traditional artist and made the shift to digital as a result of jobs I had early in my career, but the transition was easy. I love Photoshop and the Wacom pen, and I never looked back once I made the switch."

THE HUNTER
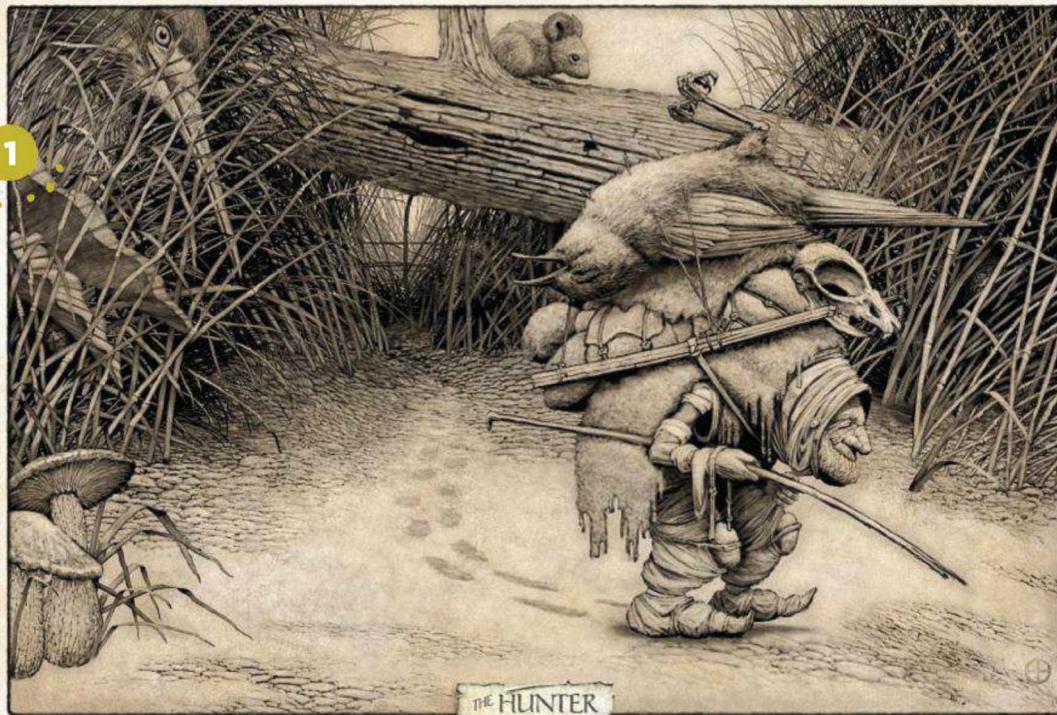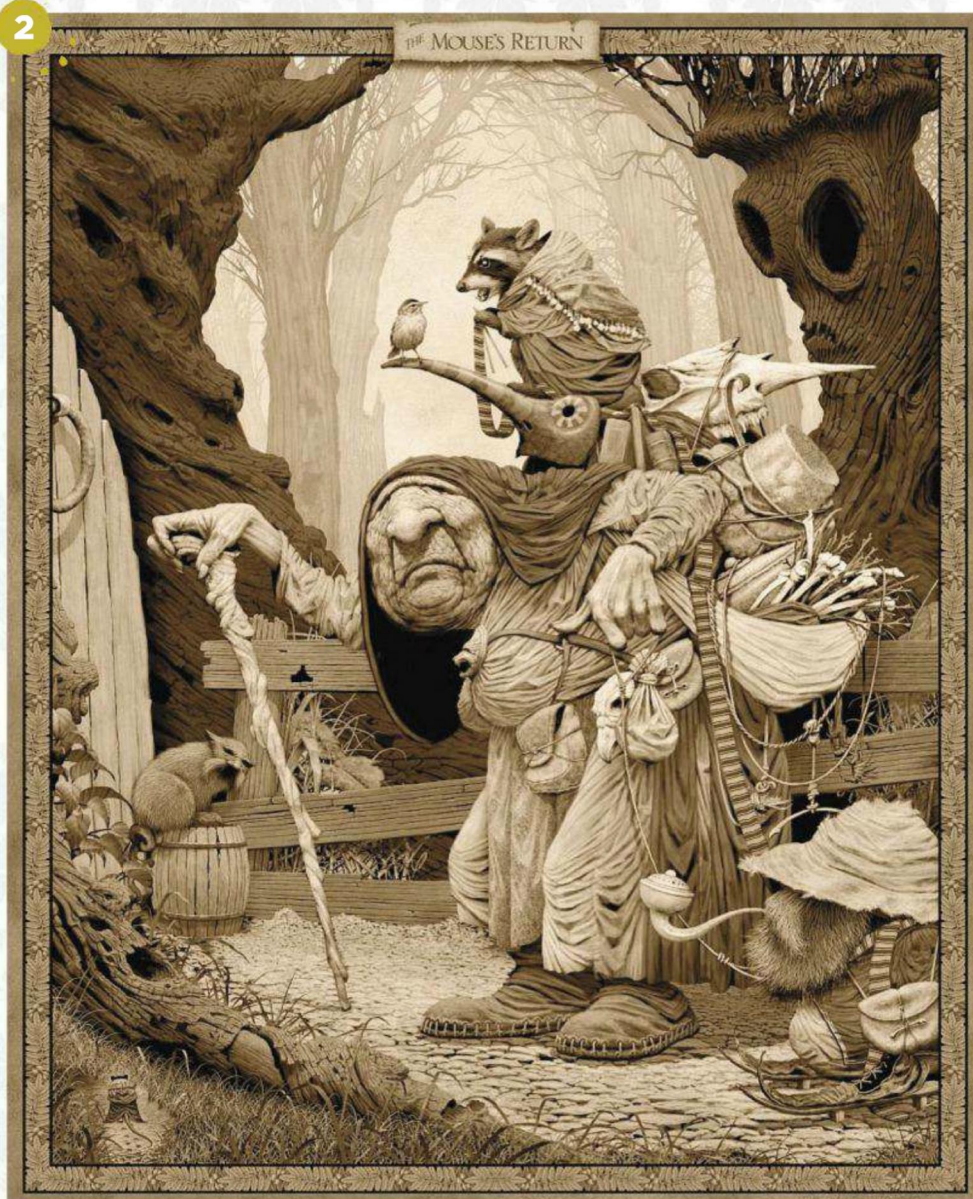
THE MOUSE'S RETURN

1 THE HUNTER "I've always been fascinated with the nature of prey–predator relationships, and how the hunter can become the hunted in an astonishing moment."

2 THE MOUSE'S RETURN "This image grew from my fascination with Brueghel's paintings that depict a small village, with its mundane activities, while something profound takes place in a remote corner – the fall of Icarus or the crucifixion. This illustration won the Gold Medal Award in Spectrum's The Best in Contemporary Fantastic Art category."

3 HIS MAJESTY'S (2ND) MOST ESTEEMED ROYAL PET WALKER "This is my most recent illustration, and a return to story-telling. The drunk porter in Shakespeare's Macbeth is a favourite character of mine, and I wanted to depict a similar character in a more fantastic scenario."

4 LORD EVERGESTIS "Evergestis is actually a genus of moths, so Lord Evergestis is my tribute to the genius of taxonomy and its hierarchy."

3

His Majesty's
(2nd) Most-Esteemed
Royal-Pet Walker

4

His Excellency - Lord Evergreen

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"Ed's astonishing eye for detail and creating textures breathes life into his gnarled and knobbly characters, who wouldn't look out of place in a Brothers Grimm story. You can just imagine that old woman getting up to some dark mischief!

Shona Cutt,
Designer

SEND US YOUR ARTWORK!

Want to see your digital art grace these very pages? Send your work to us, along with an explanation of your techniques, the title of each piece of art, a photo of yourself and your contact details. Images should be sent as 300dpi JPEG files, on CD or DVD. All artwork is submitted on the basis of a non-exclusive worldwide licence to publish, both in print and electronically.

You can also email submissions for FXPosé. Bear in mind that files must be no more than 5MB in total, or we won't receive them.
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Greg Broadmore's very
own Lord Cockswain
stands triumphant on
Venus. Find out more
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www.drgrordborts.com.

66 My IP started by drawing ray guns
12 years ago for fun – just playing
around with classic sci-fi shapes 99

Greg Broadmore
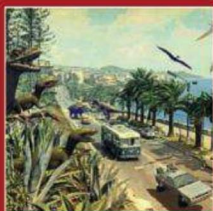
Brave new world

Intellectual properties There are a million ways to get better at your art, and one potentially lucrative one is to establish and develop your very own IP

Intellectual property. It may sound like something from an existentialist novel, but this rather distracting, weighty term can translate into a digital artist's functional friend.

IPs can be the doodles that you kept working at, the character you continued to flesh out, or the world in which you and your Wacom stylus return to when your mind is given free reign to wander. There are various ways to claim an IP – usually seeking copyright by speaking to an IP lawyer is the best starting point – and the very fact that you're working on something that you own can provide an added incentive to your creative process.

The key thing, according to Weta Workshop artist and Dr Grordbort-creator Greg Broadmore, is to work from your own passions. "My IP started by me drawing ray guns 12 or so years ago for fun, playing around with classic sci-fi shapes," he recalls. A couple of years after that Greg started at Weta and during a Christmas break gave one of his paintings to fellow artist Richard Taylor as a gift. "We chatted about turning them into a limited edition run of 'real' ray guns, and the idea was crystallised at that point." It was after the first three 'real' ray guns were made that Greg thought of the gun's back-story, and soon enough the idea of Dr. Grordbort's Contrapulatronic Dingus Directory was born.

The inspiration can come from anywhere. For example, Dan LuVisi's decision to work on and then register his own IP came from a crushing disappointment. "I started my comic, Last Man Standing, in 2008 after I was refused pay for a pretty big job I had finished," Dan says. "To escape from a pretty horrible situation, I just put all my energy into creating these characters." The result was Last Man Standing, which Paramount bought the rights to in 2011, with plans to put it out as a film.

Dan says he had such good feedback from Last Man Standing that it gave him a creative push to boot.

> ❝ To escape from a pretty horrible situation, I just put all my energy into creating these characters ❞

Although dedication is essential, and immersion inevitable, there are risks of becoming defined by your own creation, as Punk Rock Jesus-creator Sean Gordon Murphy found out. Having worked for five years on PRJ's explicit, and some would say profane, world of his title character, Sean encountered the possibility of being typecast as a comic artist. Would potential editors forever associate him with his creation? As he says on his deviantART page (**www.bit.ly/sean-PRJ**): "I've been thinking about doing some Batman ➤➤

How's your comic creation, Last Man Standing, doing?
The rights have been bought by Paramount, and it's doing great so far. We've just welcomed David Leslie Johnson, our screenwriter, onto the project, and are waiting on the first draft.

Did you know you had a million-dollar creation on your hands?
Haha, not at all. Honestly, I didn't even imagine it'd be turned into a movie. That only dawned on me when I met the marketing guys through my publisher. Soon LMS began to bloom and thankfully someone took notice.

What makes a personal project an official IP?
You can either register it, copyright it, or once it's published, it's pretty much taken care of. Or speak to an IP lawyer.

What should artists think about when creating their own IP?
Make it real. Give it life. Don't treat it like a one-off. Make sure everything is believable and tangible. Without a world with living, breathing characters that feel real, there's no point because you'll lose the audience.

Should money-making concerns be at the fore of your mind when developing an IP?
No, don't think about the money. Believe in your project. Otherwise why bother? Push your goal, and it'll be seen by everyone. People are attracted to creativity and success, so either way is a win/win situation.

Has LMS's success inspired you to create another IP?
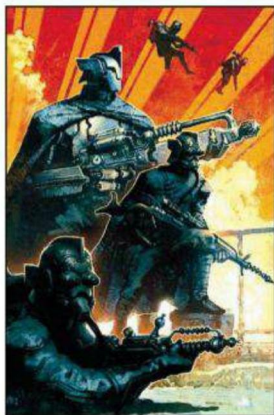Most definitely! Something I think will top LMS completely. Look out for a new series in late 2013…

Dan's a conceptual and digital artist who works in film, video games and comic books and lives in California, US.
www.danluvisiart.com

Dr. Grordbort's Contrapulatronic Dingus Directory: the whole idea shot out of a ray gun.

after Punk Rock Jesus, because PRJ might be viewed as controversial [and] there's a chance that the controversy might eliminate my chances of ever working on Batman." As an artist for Vertigo, Sean didn't want to lock doors between him and DC Comics. "I spoke to two editors about my concerns, and they agreed that it was a possibility," he says.

However, if you're not planning on creating a piece of work that features a punk-rocking clone manifestation of Jesus Christ, developing your own IP will mainly give you plenty of room to develop your artistic instincts unchecked. For Greg, this is the main appeal of thinking of your personal artwork in such formal terms as intellectual property. "I've never even considered the commercial aspects at all," he admits, "I mean, I would never have given the damn thing an unpronounceable name if I had any marketing sense."

Forget all that. Working on an IP of your own is a fantastic way to discover your artistic potential, and if it develops into a commercial enterprise, then all the better. "It's good to remember that it's impossible to second guess what an audience might want. For every hit IP that ticked all the boxes commercially, I could point out hundreds that fell flat," says Greg. "People just like good stories, interesting characters and fascinating places." So, what are you waiting for?

Scouting for skills

Netted Taking the plunge, artist Yanni Davros found the easiest way to be noticed by potential employers was to get back on his computer

It's always good to have a frequently refreshed presence online. With thousands of digital artists all competing for a commission that pays the monthly bills, one more update a day can make all the difference.

That's what Yanni Davros found out, as an automatic update on his blog was seen by Suzanne Grundy from The Zharmae Publishing Press and turned into commissions for two book covers.

And the timing couldn't be better. Having just celebrated the year anniversary of quitting all his day jobs and venturing out as a freelancer, it's a welcome addition to Yanni's CV. His work adorns the books Ends of Man, available now, and Time Quest Revisited: Star Rashanon, out this summer.

Besides the two additional covers Yanni has bagged from Zharmae this year, he'll be designing products and apparel for Lvl Up, an online store featuring merchandise for gamers. See more of his art here: **www.yannidavrosart.com**.
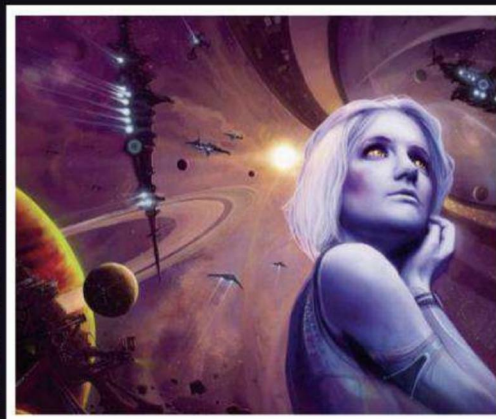
A year after taking the plunge and going freelance full-time, Yanni's art adorns two new book covers and he's designing merchandise, too.

Wacom taps into Anime

Double whammy Two big names in digital art – Smith Micro and Wacom – have joined forces

Smith Micro and Wacom have announced plans to launch multi-touch functionality for Anime Studio users on Bamboo Multi-Touch tablets – with a special upgrade to Anime Studio 8.1.

There are 30 new proposed features to be experienced in the 8.1 update, including the ability to use finger gestures. Single finger taps and gestures will enable artists to zoom, drag and drop, rotate and scale, among other tasks.

Anime Studio 8.1 will be the first animation software to support Wacom's Multi-Touch tablets, and it follows a strong trend. "Over the past few years, the iPhone and multi-touch finger gestures have dramatically changed the way people expect to work with their favourite tools and software," says Smith Micro's Steve Yatson.

To find more details about, or to purchase, Anime Studio 8.1 go to **http://anime.smithmicro.com**.
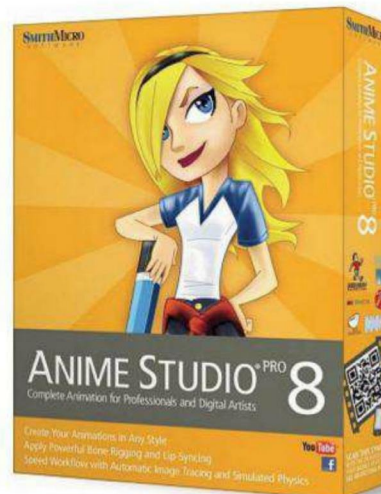
You can purchase a copy of Anime Studio Debut 8 for £27, and the weightier Pro 8 for £113, with lots of upgrade options available.

Dinosaurs and time machines catch some rays on the French Riviera...

The usually ponderous AT-AT proves to be a surprisingly challenging ride at the Imperial Rodeo.
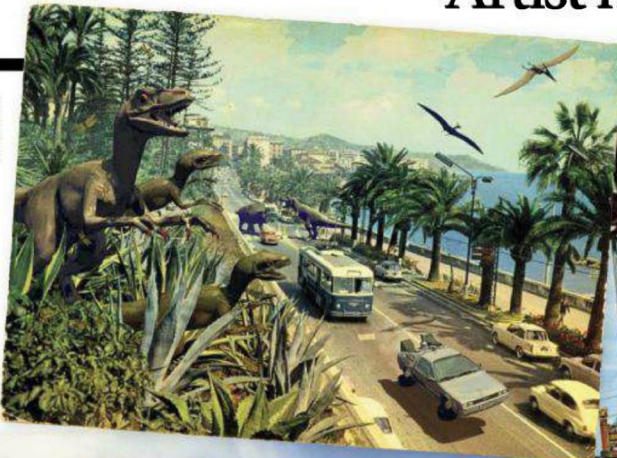
Between slugging it out with Ultraman, invading aliens grab a quick bite to eat at the Paramount Cafe.

The crew of Moonbase Alpha make a miraculous return to planet Earth, after being blasted out of orbit.
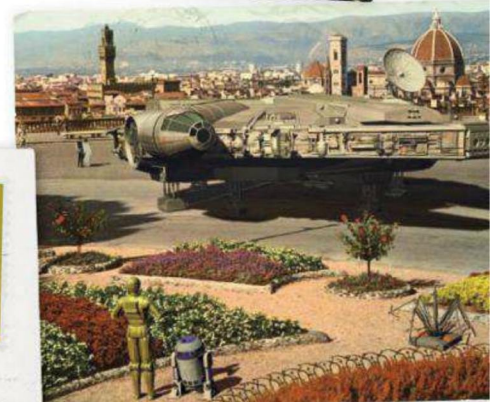
Han Solo and Princess Leia spend their honeymoon in the romantic city of Florence.
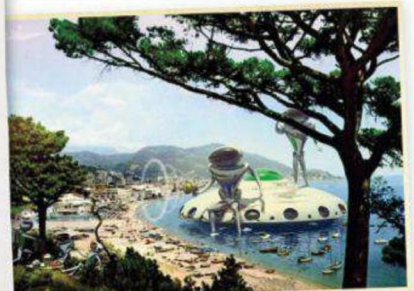
"C'mon kids, we gotta get going!" Mum and Dad call time on the extraterrestrial's picnic.

Picture postcard

Retro sci-fi There's lots of inspiration to be gleaned from vintage sci-fi material, but vintage holiday postcards…?

HG Wells' War of the Worlds predicted that aliens would invade southern England in the late 19th century. Not so. If the bevy of extraterrestrial 'photographic evidence' that Franco Brambilla has gathered over the years is anything to go by, it was 1950s California that took the brunt of the invasion.

"The invasion we're talking about started in 2007, mostly for fun," says Franco. "I started populating picture-perfect images with aliens, dinosaurs and such, for the simple fact that I'm a nerd, and I wanted to make some nerd art."

Franco, who's a professional book designer, has so far created 70 postcard pieces, all combining his love of B-movies, retro future and sci-fi model kits. "I do one every time I'm not illustrating some book cover, or

playing with my kids," he says. Unsurprisingly, Franco has a stash of old photos collected from street markets, and utilises skills as a 3D illustrator that he developed working on book designs for the Italian sci-fi book collection Urania, published by Mondadori. "With my work I've created two to three sci-fi illustrations a month since 1998, so I just put together all these things: my sc-fi illustration, the vintage postcards and the resulting cocktail is what I call 'invading the vintage'."

Even though this project has been on the back burner since 2007, Franco has started to receive interest in his invasion of the vintage, having received the Best Artist Award at the Italian convention Delos Days in 2011.

You can see more of his alien-invaded vintage postcards, as well as purchase them in bulk through his website: **www.francobrambilla.com**.

In short...

The latest news in brief for digital artists

ebook Digital magic

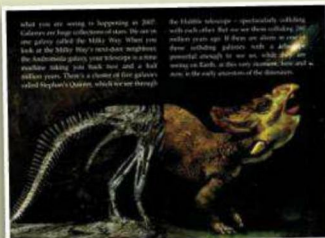Dave McKean has been busy changing the system from within. The Magic of Reality, for iPad, has won the Transworld Publishing Innovation Award. Written by Richard Dawkins and illustrated by Dave, the digital book enables you to interact with the art of one of England's most iconic artists. Find out more about the book at **www.magicofrealityapp.com**.

Hardware Brush up

iPad artists rejoice – Nomad Brush, the popular stylus for all iPads, has been updated. Created by artist Don Lee, the stylus resembles a watercolour brush, using both natural and synthetic fibres with full multi-touch support, and now has a host of new versions, including iPhone-compatible ones. More at **www.nomadbrush.com**.

Online Workshops

We at ImagineFX are always on the lookout for new, fresh digital art workshops and are delighted with the two-part, independent releases from Daniel 'Wade' Hammonds. Aimed for the beginner, Photorealism Volumes 1 & 2 are available online and on DVD. More at **www.devotion-graphics.com**.

Life is Humiliation
by Matt Boyce

Fantasy talk Explaining the inexplicable

"I'm a fan of gritty, post-apocalyptic junk punk... I like things that look lived in: layers of history caked onto things."

If you catch someone scavenging through your bins, it might just be Jeff Simpson... See page 56

Second life

Business opportunity Rising publishing costs are inspiring increasing amounts of artists to turn to digital ebooks to showcase their art

Sometimes you have to fight to find the time for personal projects. And there are instances when time is forced upon you. That's the philosophical take Marc Taro Holmes offers when considering his labour-of-love ebook Resurrection Man, currently on sale.

"Me and writer Sean Stewart first talked about the idea over a year ago," says the artist. "The studio I was with had just closed and I was about to start freelancing full time, so it seemed like the right time.

"During the 'get it done phase' of production I was drawing a couple of days a week, trying to average three images a day," Marc says. "I don't think I ever hit that goal, but for every time I went over budget on one, I'd win back some time on the next few."

The story centres on Dante Ratkay, a young dropout who lives in a fantasy world where magic is real. "Not wizards and pointy hats," says Marc, "but things like creatures manifesting out of the collective frustration simmering in city slums."

For free samples, or to buy the comic for a modest $2.99, go to: **www.tarosan.wordpress.com**.
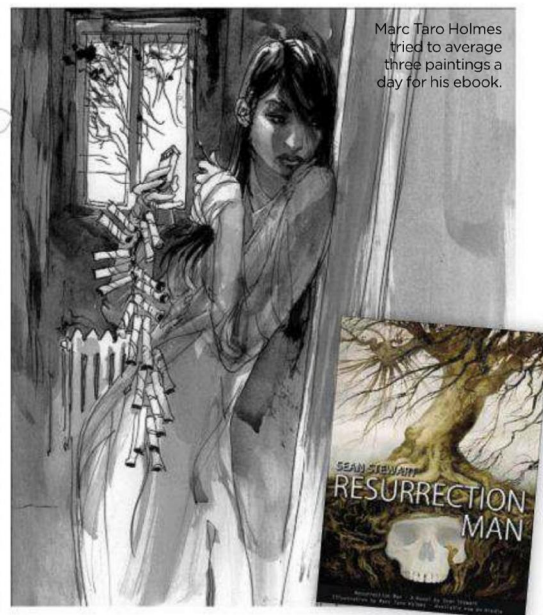
Marc Taro Holmes tried to average three paintings a day for his ebook.

Where else for digital art?

Try digital Get the usual mix of inspiration and techniques from ImagineFX delivered to a digital device of your choice…

When we published our first issue of ImagineFX back in the mists of 2006, our aim was to inspire a new generation into exploring the thrilling possibilities of digital art. So it's fitting that today we're continuing on that course by giving you more options on where you can get

Oooh, get us! Your favourite magazine is now available on many platforms.

hold of ImagineFX, with Barnes & Noble's **Nook tablet being the latest.**

That's not all. While continuing to offer high quality at low cost though Zinio, late last year we also launched ImagineFX on iTunes to enthusiastic reader response. "I get ImagineFX on my iPad now," says long-time reader Matthew White, "and it was simple. I previously subscribed to the magazine, which I really enjoyed, but I didn't use the DVD as much as I thought I would. Now I can get it digitally and it costs me almost half the price."

Not only are we aiming to add the disc content to these editions soon, we're aiming to become available on even more devices – keep an eye out for us on Kindle Fire.

Want to find out more? Try us out free for 14 days on Nook: **www.bit.ly/ifxnook**. Get a free, full issue of ImagineFX if you have an iPad, iPhone or iPhone Touch (**www.bit.ly/imaginefxapp)**, or visit Zinio for desktop or Android versions (**www.zinio.com/imaginefx)**.

ImagineFX is available on Barnes & Noble's new tablet – the Nook – and Apple's iPhone.

News with a view _

deviantART

+deviantWATCH

Here are some of the many gems we found on the pages of deviantART…

Danny Cruz
www.dannycruz4.deviantart.com

If you like your art in the classic black and white vein, this is the dA site for you. Danny creates powerful characters with his scratchy black ink, and isn't afraid to morph human anatomy to create startling species. Click into his Characters folder and you get to see a flash of colour as well.
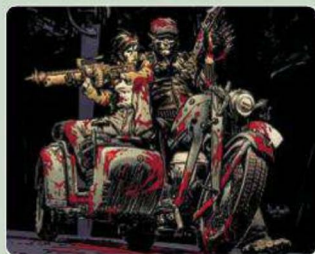
Sean Gordon Murphy
www.bit.ly/sgmurphy

Sean's deviantART site is crammed with pages freshly torn from his comic projects. He offers his work at various stages, from sketch to full colour prints, Batman to his very own Punk Rock Jesus, and with a regularly updated journal, this is an intimate look at a current comic artist.

Miki Ivey
www.miki-.deviantart.com

There's a wealth of great 2D digital art that would have made this site worth a look, but Miki also happens to be a talented sculptor – and a sculptor of My Little Pony to boot! Expect colour, great poses and a whole lot of impossibly delightful mane and tail action.

This strange cube is an iPod dock with lush sound. It's a genuine stock-sale bargain.

Every few years I buy Boris Vallejo's artbook masterpiece Mirage and slice out the pages for inspiration, until they deteriorate. This is my favourite, Vampire's Kiss – to my mind, the benchmark in oil painting!

Here are three steps to a Boris painting, to remind me how easy this should be. Though it never, ever is.

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

The MacBook Pro and 6x11-inch Intuos3. Being the same ratio they pack neatly into a laptop shoulder bag to make the perfect travelling companions.

Patrick J Jones

Antipodean set up Patrick fought the cold growing up in Ireland, but it's the sunlight that he's battling these days in Brisbane, Australia

Moving to Australia provided a chance to finally create a home studio. After living in cramped London we bought a sprawling old run-down home in Brisbane and I quickly started fixing it up.

Originally I chose a studio room on the west of the house, but got blinded and broiled by the afternoon sun. The new studio is now on the cooler east side of the house. This stuff was never a concern growing up in arctic Ireland!

The studio is split down the middle. One side's digital, while the other is traditional (there's a wall that separates them). My workstation is a Mac Pro and non-glare Cinema Display. At present I'm colour correcting a photo of Artemis and the Satyr to keep as a digital file before the art is

An ornate sword courtesy of Kelsi White from my Fantasy Masterclass (just the hilt's visable); a Stan and Ollie statue from my wife Cathy; a genuine Vincent Villafranca sculpture; and a real American flag. This could be the start of some serious collecting!

My artist pass for the first IlluXCon in 2008. I was commissioned to paint the official poster, by Pat Wilshire. It was an unreal experience meeting the world's greatest fantasy artists for the first time, with everyone wearing my art around their necks.
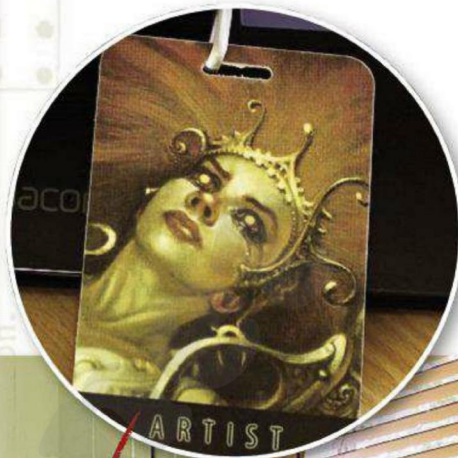
shipped to the Atlas Gallery in Indiana (the original oil painting still hangs on the wall on the traditional studio side, for now).

Framed artworks from past commissions hang on my digital side. The Conan poster was a private oil painting commission, but the collectors, Girasolcollectables.com, were publishers too, and also negotiated poster sales with me. Commissions just don't get much better than that.

To the left of my traditional studio area, a large painting titled The Sacrifice is drying before being shipped to the Allentown Art Museum in the US. On the main easel is art-in-progress for IlluXCon 2012. For inspiration I surround myself with art by great artists, and also my own art, to make sure I'm constantly improving. The bookshelves are stuffed with art books and topped with anatomy models, and the portable easel

holds reference books in between my life drawing and Fantasy Masterclasses.

The studio is my Nirvana: a place where I get lost creating online ebooks, movie tutorials and digital or traditional artworks. It's work, but it doesn't feel like it.

Patrick's digital and traditional ebook and movie tutorials can be downloaded from his online store, which also contains his blog and news page: www.pjartworks.com.

My giant-sized Intuos4 tablet; a prize won in Massive Black's Newborn Challenge, awarded for my Painter Frankenstein art (taped to the top right of my painting easel).
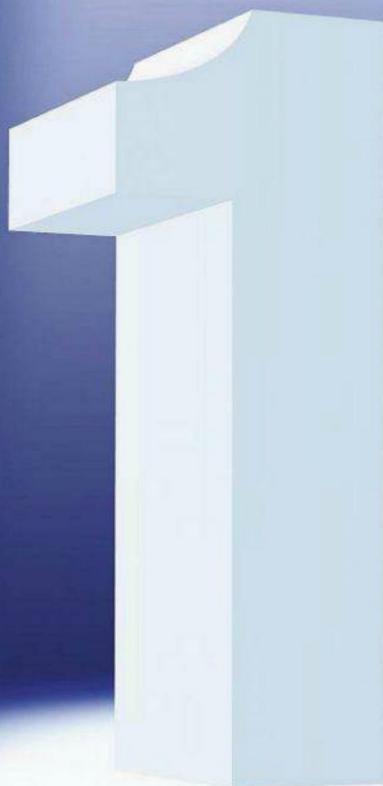
1 WEB HOST
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FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX Forum
Winners

Image of the month

Stork Trek The crew of the Starship Interpond continue their great art adventure with the introduction of Mr Stork, who has a fondness for logic and fresh fish

Having enjoyed a previous MYFX forum challenge called Captain James T Quack, and being disappointed about not having time to take part in the Lieutenant Uhurowl follow-up, Euan was keen to explore a new challenge based around the crew of the Starship Interpond.

"I was delighted with this challenge," he tells us. "And while searching for storks references, I came across the shoe-billed stork. Its prehistoric and alien look seemed appropriate to the character, so I decided to use that as the basis for my painting. Now, if I can just coerce the forum moderators into continuing the theme."

MYFX TITLE: Mr Stork
JOINT WINNER: Eaun Mactavish (Em...)
GALLERY: www.imaginefx.com/em
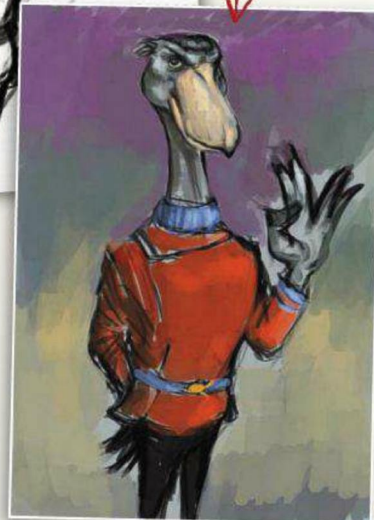
A stork channels the essence of Mr Spock in Euan's winning entry in this month's Forum challenge. The duck head symbol on the belt is a nice touch.

IMAGINEFX CRIT
"I just love it – the sense of character, the light. The face really stands out for me. He's got a great expression!"
Warren Lee (Thulsadoom)
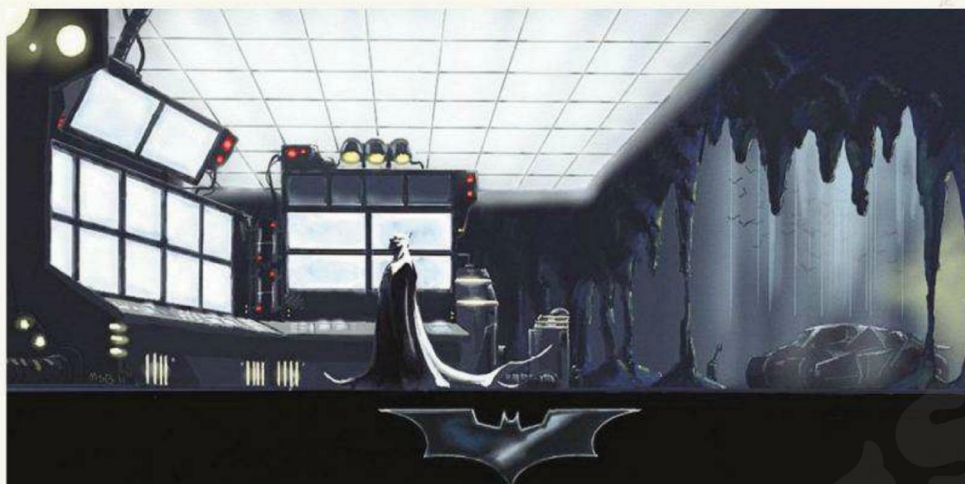
MYFX TITLE: The Batcave
JOINT WINNER: Bergy68
GALLERY: www.imaginefx.com/bergy68

"Batman has always been one of my favourite characters. I wanted the piece to have the same feeling as the latest movies, as well as that of a painted graphic novel. The final touch was when the Tumbler was finally finished with the bats in the background."

MYFX TITLE: Le Tarot
JOINT WINNER: Bergy68
GALLERY: www.maginefx.com/bergy68

"I'm new to digital painting, so the challenge was getting used to ArtRage. The great thing about these challenges is the input you get from other forumites. A couple of members mentioned how the tower looked flat at first. When I added the brick texture, it all came together. I finished the image off by painting the pieces breaking away."
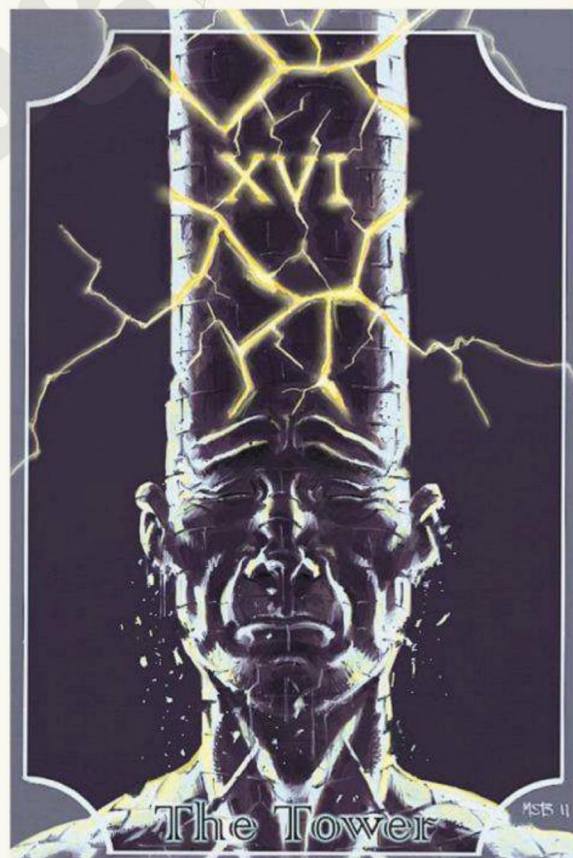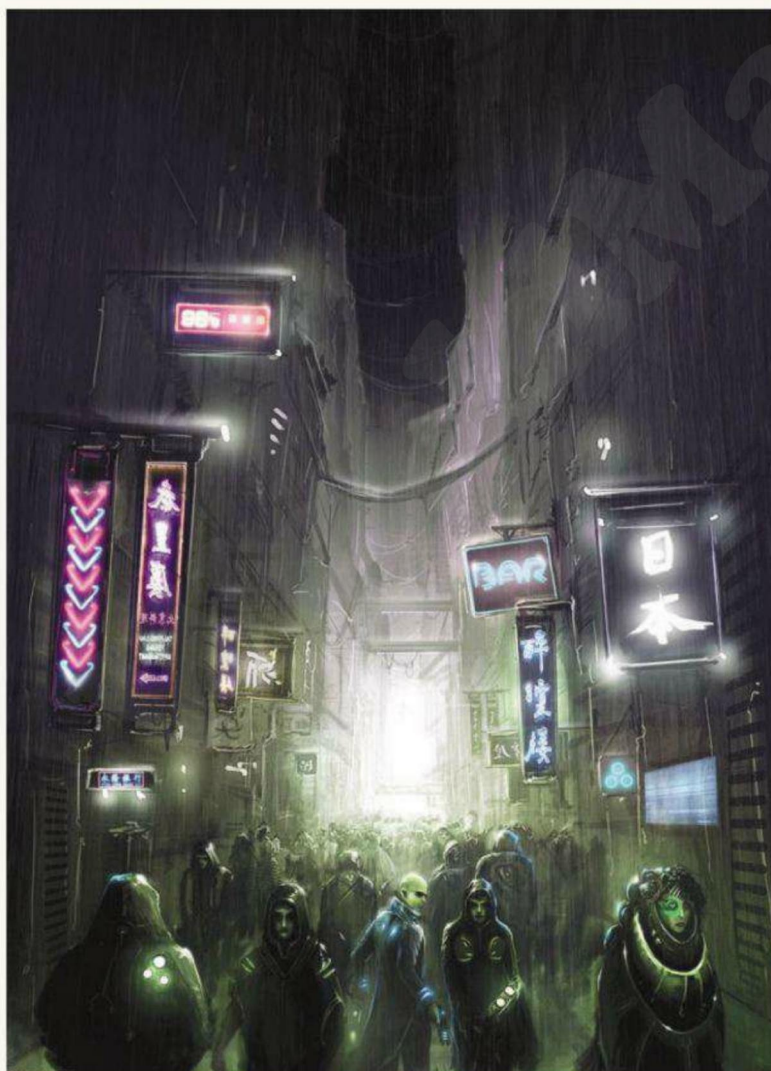
MYFX TITLE: Blade Runner
JOINT WINNER: No Logic
GALLERY: www.imaginefx.com/nologic

"Blade Runner is classic stuff and 'must know' for all sci-fi geeks like me. It was innovative back then in 1982 and it's still fresh now. Its dense, dark atmosphere of overpopulated Earth with all its advanced, yet kinda rusty technology gives almost endless inspiration for artists. I wanted to show all these elements in this work."

Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS

Contact the editor, Claire Howlett, on **claire@imaginefx.com** or write to ImagineFX, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW, UK

Follow us on twitter:
www.twitter.com/imaginefx

Tell us your thoughts on:
www.facebook.com/imaginefx

Collected editions please!

I've been a follower of ImagineFX since 2006. Sadly, because I haven't always been able to afford it I've missed a few issues and was wondering if you plan to release hard or soft-cover collected editions of earlier issues? I know you have the digital version of previous issues available, but I would love to have physical copies sitting proudly in my bookshelf. Thank you for shining a light on fantasy and sci-fi art and helping to promote our beloved genre.
David Keen, via email

Claire replies David, we have previously released collected editions of ImagineFX, but have no plans to do so for the foreseeable future. We will, however, be putting together some themed special editions of older content. Keep an eye out in March/April for news on these.

Eagle-eyed gamer

Something I have noticed a few artists mention in your hallowed pages – especially in the Artist in Residence section – is that they use gaming keypads along with their tablets. As many of them are programmable, I went out and bought one. The software for it enables me to assign keys or program macros for key combos. Given the state my desk is often in, I've found it easier than the keyboard to put on my

DID YOU MISS ISSUE 80?
We've still got a few copies left, but you need to move fast! See page 50 for details on how to get hold of one.

Not just for Modern Warfare: these gaming keypads have their uses in digital art, too.

knee, as the gaming keypad is similar in width to my leg.

It's set up so when I open Photoshop, the Photoshop profile loads. I've only had it a few days and think it's great. It's putting my commonly used commands almost literally at my fingertips, without darting around a keyboard. Now if only it were wireless…
Darcy Waters, New Zealand

Claire replies Darcy, good spot! I've clearly been too busy drooling over the art books that appear in the Artist in Residence feature to notice the gaming keypads! I wonder if other readers will take up this piece of kit to improve their workflow.

Bring on the badgers!

I had a subscription to ImagineFX that recently ran out. The key reason I wouldn't renew it is the dreadful condition that copies arrived in. You've chosen, for international subscriptions, to use the thinnest and cheapest plastic possible to enclose the magazine.

Literally every issue of my subscription arrived either folded against the spine, bent in half or knackered. If I wanted something nice for my reference shelf, I had to go to the local store and buy another copy.

This isn't a condemnation on the bang-up job you do with the magazine. This is a plea to have the person responsible for your shipping materials, the same person who ran your cost/benefit analysis regarding subscribers ire versus condition received, flogged with wet noodles. If they're the key decision-maker in the purchasing of the shipping envelope/tissue paper you've chosen to use, please smear them in honey and throw them into a pit of angry badgers.
*Jim Kitchen, via email*

Claire replies Hello Jim, sorry to hear this. We're a part of a large publishing company of over 80 magazines and it operates on a 'one size fits all' policy. I'll raise the question again with my subscription team to see if there's a solution. In the meantime, I'll help round up those badgers! And if your post worker is bending the issue to fit it in your post box, a gentle reminder not to do so may work wonders.

Aiming high

I'm 16 years old and everything I read here inspires me. I love digital art, I'm getting a tablet soon and I can't wait to send you some art! My favourite section is FXPóse. Reading about all the upcoming artists and seeing their work is just the best. One day I'll send you some of my work!
Ben Hardie, via email

Claire replies Ben, looking forward to seeing your art. For other readers wanting to appear in ImagineFX, turn to page 19 for details on how to submit your work.
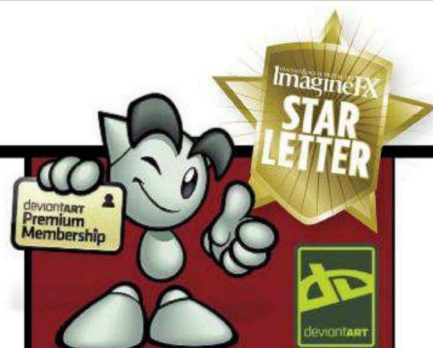
Here's what I know…

I stumbled across ImagineFX in Barnes & Noble when the guide to drawing and painting fantasy females came out a few years ago. I've always had a bent toward fantasy art, but had little time to practise because I work in a full-time job. In the past two years, my artwork has increased in quality and it's something I couldn't have done if I hadn't run across ImagineFX.

You've taught me several important things. First, it's great to fail. You should always try, and if it turns out to be a failure, then you've learned something important. Second, using reference isn't always a bad thing. Your DVDs of reference photography have opened new doors to me. Finally, experimenting is the best thing you can do. The more you try, the better you get.

Thank you for all that you've done. Every issue is an inspiration. I've included two of my best pieces of work, from 2009 – before I had discovered your magazine – and 2012. Thank you, so so much!
Amanda Mickelson, via email

Claire replies No, thank you Amanda! We never tire of hearing how our magazine inspires people to get painting. It's also great to see how you've progressed since 2009, too.
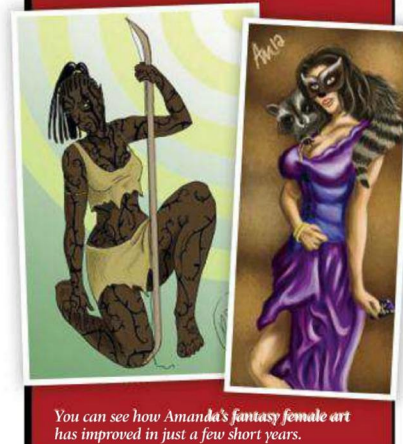
You can see how Amanda's fantasy female art has improved in just a few short years.

Artist Q&A

GOT A QUESTION FOR OUR EXPERTS?
DROP US A LINE AT HELP@IMAGINEFX.COM

The ImagineFX panel
FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART

Nick Harris
Gloucestershire-based Nick went digital in 2000 after 18 years working with traditional methods. He works mainly on children's illustrations.
www.nickillus.com

Mélanie Delon
Mélanie is a freelance fantasy illustrator. She works as a cover artist for several publishing houses, and on her personal artbook series.
www.melaniedelon.com

Bill Corbett
Bill works as a freelance artist producing illustrations for media groups, public relations companies, small businesses, bands and private clients.
www.billcorbett.co.uk

Jonathan Standing
Jonathan is an English artist and illustrator. He's based near Toronto, Canada, and works for a developer in the video games industry.
www.jonathanstanding.com

Jim Pavelec
Jim's surrounded by demons, monsters and devils. His new book, Hymns & Wretched Offerings to the Golden Ones, is an exploration of this world.
www.jimpavelec.com

Jon Hodgson
Jon trained as a fine artist, and is busy art directing an RPG based on The Lord of the Rings, to be published by Cubicle 7 Entertainment.
www.jonhodgson.com

Lauren K Cannon
Lauren is a freelance fantasy artist who specialises in the surreal. She lives in a small woodland village in New Jersey, US.
www.navate.com

Study real animals to discover the best gestures and features to make your creature appear aggressive and 'evil'.

Question
How can I ensure my fantasy beast looks evil?
Henry Taylor, US

Answer
Nick replies

It might sound odd, but looking at the stereotypes for villainous characters in old animated cartoons is a great starting point. While cute characters have large eyes and often child-like proportions, villains usually have small, mean eyes with brows angrily slanted down, they have sharp teeth and are generally more angular. These clichés work, but it's up to you to bring individuality and life to your critter.

What appears evil is relative to the context of your image, so style your particular beast accordingly. I'm going for downright nasty with my dragon – borderline demonic. So why not employ all the tricks to emphasise this? I've picked an angle looking up at the dragon and lighting

Sketch your beast idea from several angles to gain a better understanding of how the forms work. It'll also give you the chance to start developing a more solid idea of its character.

from underneath to add to the feeling of threat. Using the Watercolour brush in ArtRage Studio Pro 3.5 on layers set to Multiply (unlike Watercolour Blend mode it saves accurately to PSD file format if needed), I build tone using muted colours over a pencil drawing.

With early sketches pinned on screen as reference I can stay close to my original design. I use familiar animal behaviour that is recognised as threatening, like cats putting their ears flat and wrinkling their nose when snarling. I position the horns where the ears might be and give the dragon a raised, gnarled snout. You can also think of cliché horror stalwarts like making the head appear more skull-like, but remember to refer to animal examples.

Step-by-step:
Give your creature a look of malevolence

1 Using sketches that refer to both animal/reptile and bird forms I start drawing my beast on a layer over a mid-tone. Using the Watercolour brushes I paint washes on layers set to Multiply to build up some forms. I add some texture early on a separate layer using an opaque Chalk brush over ArtRage's Stencils.

2 Under-lighting tends to add a more sinister touch to a character and works well with angular forms. It also offers great scope to exploit textural elements if you want to take it that way. I bring in colour with washes, tweaking the line-work as I go. I go with red and/or black for a more demonic dragon look.

3 I build tone and colour with more washes, adding solid colour accents over the top to crisp up some areas. I keep the eyes small and mean looking, and equip Cuddles with sharp talons/spikes/teeth, and tough-looking skin and scales. I also add scars and tears that seldom look out of place on a beast like this.

Question
What's the best approach to take for painting a feathered wing turning to flame?
Jane Noble, England

The traditional fiery red/yellow colour scheme isn't essential as long as the element is bright enough.

Answer
Mélanie replies

The best way to start the depiction of a bird turning to flame, such as a phoenix, is to first paint the bird's feathers as normal, to give them the shape I want. I can now work the light, I need the bird's plumage to look incandescent, but rather than simply painting fire it might prove more interesting to play with the actual tones.

On another layer, with a light colour, I simply increase the length of the feather, following its natural direction. Next I change the layer mode to Screen, which will increase the light levels and introduce some pleasing colour variations. If the effect becomes too strong I adjust the layer opacity until I produce something that fits the composition. I repeat this several times with different layers and colours. The most important thing here is to give the impression of continuity between the feather and the fire, so that the transition looks smooth.

Now I add a glow effect all around the feathers. I need to keep a certain unity in the image and the glow will strengthen the impression of fire.

Then it's on to the detailing stage. I don't want to lose my feather under too many light effects,

so with a very small basic brush and with a bright colour I refine some parts of the plumage, and add some small details here and there, especially on the base of the feathers. At this stage I also play with the layer mode to experiment with effects. I add small sparks of fire to increase the dynamism of the composition. This also adds to the feeling of burning, flickering flames that are about to consume the bird.

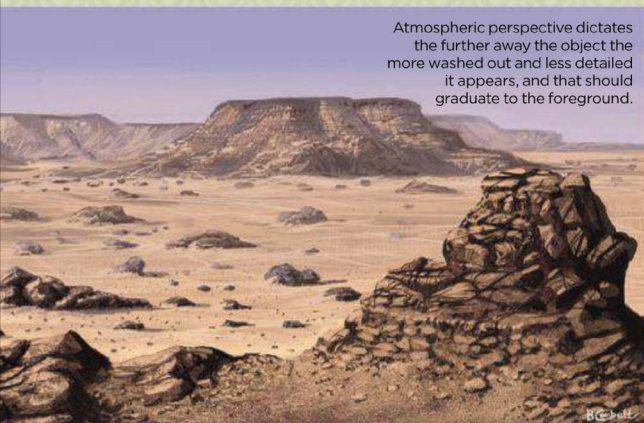### Artist's secret

THE SMOKE TRICK

To add more intensity and smoothness to the flames, add some smoke all around the bird's feathers, using a very smooth brush. This will also unify the composition and help to reinforce the transition between the feathers and the flames.

Atmospheric perspective dictates the further away the object the more washed out and less detailed it appears, and that should graduate to the foreground.

Answer
Bill replies

It's never easy trying to reproduce a natural landscape when painting. There are so many elements involved that it can be quite overwhelming when you attempt to squeeze it all in. Luckily, there are a few tricks you can use to convince your viewer of the validity of your unwelcoming landscape.

Remember that the human brain will always try to make sense of chaos, and this is no different when viewing a painting. By giving the general outline and context of a landscape it's possible to fool the viewer into seeing more than they're actually viewing. Random lines, blobs and dots create a vague texture when observed close up, but pull back and you have a sandy rock strewn surface with plenty of grit. It's digital impressionism!

There are the simple rules of logistics, too. A harsh environment is an extreme environment. Rock and sand are that much harsher when there's no water, no clouds and no plant life. Finally, keep your refined sandy look at the foreground of your piece. No one can see a grain of sand, but they can see the smaller stones and the glints of light that reflect off the sand particles.
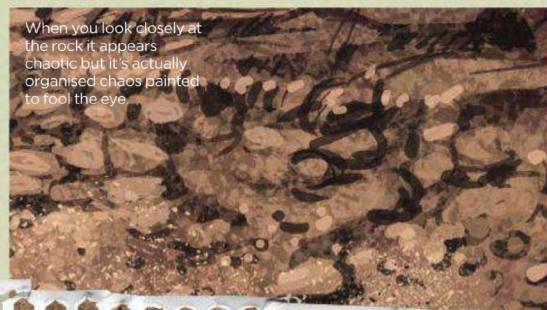
When you look closely at the rock it appears chaotic but it's actually organised chaos painted to fool the eye

Artist's secret

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Don't overcomplicate things in your mind before you start them. So many people say to me, "I can't paint landscapes" or "I don't do portraits." However, as an artist you can paint and draw anything you put your mind to.

Question
How do I design crazy, stylised weapons that still look real?
Marcus Collins, Scotland

The amount of visual interest in the armour and the added weight of the shield on his back help to balance out the huge axe.

Answer
Jonathan replies

When stylising weaponry to make it big or over the top, you have to carefully consider the design of the character who's holding it. Here, the axe I ended up designing for my orc is totally impractical and would never really exist as a weapon, but it adds flavour to the image and so I need to justify it visually with the design of the character holding it.

To start things off, I consider their body type. I did toy with the idea of giving the orc a sculpted, bodybuilder's physique, but to be honest it's pretty boring and makes the orc look a bit too appealing. Instead, I give him a wiry build, not muscular but still strong-looking.

Next, I turn my attention towards his clothing and armour. I make sure that the shapes and manufacture of both his armour and clothes match that of the axe; they all should look as if they belong together. In this case, I've gone for an aesthetic where the orc's gear is cobbled together from bits of other people's equipment – perhaps slain enemies.

Question
How do I create a series of similar but varied compositions for gaming cards?
Rhoda Stevens, US

Answer
Jim replies

To keep things fresh when producing a large batch of card designs – which usually for me are demons – I try to concentrate on using a variety of camera angles and ranges to vary the composition. This means that you should think of each image as a still shot from a movie.

If I want the beast to be powerful and menacing I'll paint it from a very close point of view, and have it charging directly toward the viewer, as if it were trying to burst right out of the image area. If the demon is dark and mysterious I may create a scene in which it's farther away from the viewer. This way I can use less detail, enabling the atmosphere and lighting to do the work of making it creepy.

I also like to move the camera up or down to help create various moods within the composition. For example, if the point of view is very low then the viewer will feel like the demon is lurking over them, waiting to unleash its power on their puny mortal shell. If the camera angle is very high the viewer gets a feeling of omniscience, like they're being allowed to witness some malevolent activities.

Question

How can I convey the energy of clashing swords?

Jessie Brown, US

A big tilt and clumping the figures together in a series of diagonals brings the energy.

Answer
Jon replies

The obvious problem here is that an illustration doesn't come with sound or movement. However, dynamism, composition and lines of force are close to hand. We want to make an image that drives all the energy to the point of impact of the swords. Sometimes this can be better achieved by showing the moment before or after the actual impact, and this can be added in as an additional element. Here you can see that the axe is ready to swing down – our brains will fill in the next motion.

The more energetic in general the image is, the more likely we are to 'feel' it. This means using lots of diagonals, and making use of a tilted composition to make even the most basic of horizontals – the horizon – a steep tilt. To add to the energy we can include lots of particles flying about: spin out the effect of the impact by using flying dirt, snow, dust… anything that can add movement. These echo the small amount of material that might be believably struck-off as two sword blades clash.

Artist's secret
THE DUTCH TILT

Dutch Tilt, German Tilt or 'Jaunty Angle' (no, really) is the cinematic technique of tilting the camera to add increased dynamism. Diagonals are thought to be more energetic than boring verticals and horizontals, and it makes us feel like we're part of the action.

The onion skin process of refining a sketch. Make use of the digital tools to overlay and refine in layers that can be removed or lowered in opacity.

Step-by-step: Maximise visual impact, whatever the viewpoint

1 In this painting I moved the camera far away from the action to help reinforce the size of the beasts in comparison to the figure. When doing this, ensure that the main creature has a strong silhouette to make it pop from the background and be distinct.

2 Here I've chosen to set the point of view low, which puts the viewer firmly on their knees before this demonic mistress. This gives the cruel-looking character a sense of power and might, as the viewer is forced to look up at her. Grovel weaklings!

3 I tried a couple of things here. I put the camera very high, but very close to the creature. This way the viewer feels like there's no escape. Again, the creature has a clear silhouette to make it stand away from the background, ensuring that it's visible on a small card.

A hairstyle is only part of a character; body language, costume design, and colour mood also communicate strongly with the viewer.

Question

How can I create a sultry and sexy character that avoids all the usual stereotypes?

Adéle Bisset, France

Answer

Lauren replies

To answer the question I set about designing a witch. I need to consider the character as a whole as well as aspects that define her, such as her hairstyle. I want her to have unkempt hair, but to avoid an intentionally bad hair day from ruining the vibe of a picture, I focus on the rest of the image first.

Take full advantage of body language and gesture. I give my witch a dynamic, mysterious, sultry pose. So much can be said about a character through their gesture and the way that they dress, telling stories through their wardrobe.

I think about who my witch is while I plan my painting. Dirty and matted hair on an otherwise sexy character will probably deepen her story: it's unexpected, and will make the viewer try to figure out her background.

While the hair shouldn't overpower the piece, I do want the result to be sensuous so it's important to give it a level of attention and detail that suits the rest of the image. Otherwise, it'll look sloppy rather than 'dishevelled design'. Look at photos of natural dreadlocks and matted hair to understand how hair behaves in that kind of state, and what kind of texture it has.

Artist's secret

FINDING ORDER IN CHAOS

I like to sketch in hair with my brush at around 40 per cent opacity, instead of full opacity. This forces me to overlay strokes, which means right away I create 'locks' of hair to work from, which really helps with tangled hair.

Step-by-step: Add to your witch's back-story with bed-hair

1 I tend to leave hair until later on in the painting process anyway, but especially for this kind of project be sure to work out the rest of your image first. By focusing on the anatomy, the gesture and the colours, I've already established a moody and mysterious image that works on its own merits. The hair will simply end up being an extra layer to the story.

2 I create a separate layer for the hair, and then sketch in a straggly mess with a small Spackled brush. I focus on the composition of the hair, which sounds silly but it's important to consider. I want to avoid making the matted locks too uniform, or the hair too frizzy and chaotic. Dirty hair can be lank, matted, frayed – there's a lot to explore, so research is crucial.

3 Once I'm satisfied with my basic hair sketch, I start adding in broad shadows and highlights to the mass. It's important not to get too involved in the details just yet – I just need to find the biggest clumps of hair, and then isolate different locks and strands. Basically, I'm trying to create volume and give the hair a real sense of dimensionality.


4 Lastly, I add in texture. This process is essentially just a load of scribbles with a tiny brush. It gives a great tangled look; the more scribbles you do the more matted the hair will look. I also add in some flyaways and stringy strands to make the hair even more unkempt. When the hair's detail is on par with the rest of the image, I call it a day.

Question
What's your advice on painting a rusty old portcullis and castle gates?
Robert Jenkins, US
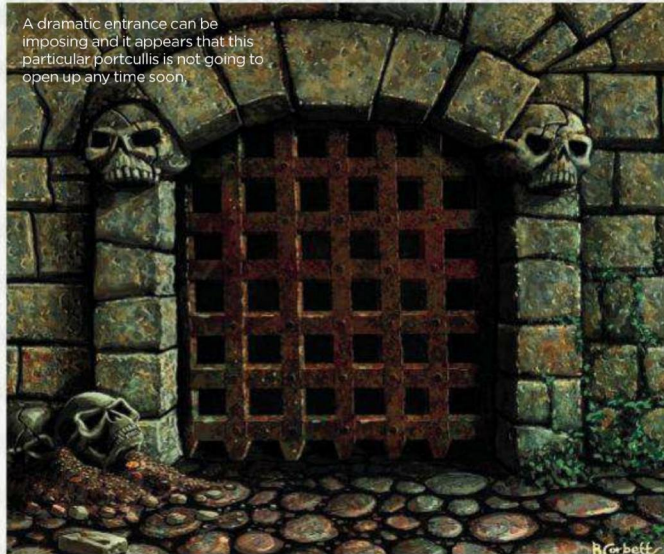
A dramatic entrance can be imposing and it appears that this particular portcullis is not going to open up any time soon.

Answer
Bill replies

Pay attention to the portcullis's surroundings, in particular the entrance that the portcullis is protecting. Rust implies age so the stones or bricks should reflect that.

A portcullis suggests its an impassable object, which suggests weight, so make the bricks big and bulky for better effect; it doesn't hurt to vary their sizes. The portcullis should already be imposing but for a little extra spice add storytelling elements around the entrance, a few little signs to warn off travellers.

When painting this portcullis in Paintshop Pro, I stick to one marble effect texture brush for both the brickwork and the rust. I start out painting the whole thing greyscale to make sure that the contrast was right. I then use my texture brush to splatter the stonework in black and white in low opacity layers until I build up a stone-like texture. I use the same trick on the portcullis, but also overlay a black and white bump 'n' scratch layer to give the gate a bit more of a rugged texture. Finally, I add colour and details.

Artist's secret
MOTTLED SURFACES
A bump 'n' scratch layer is the perfect way to add 3D-like texture to your digital paintings. Create a new layer and simply paint scratches and bumps in black and white. When done, lower the opacity until it blends to the target surface.

If all else fails then it's time for words to speak louder than gates. Some choice words written in the blood of the last creature that tried to pass through should do the trick!

Question
How do I create a spooky, chilling moonlit scene?
Michael Carter, US

Answer
Mélanie replies

Light from the moon is usually very cold and so you need to approach the colour scheme carefully. I choose a very pale violet and some silver for the light, the rest will be very simple and not saturated. Don't use pure black and white for the light and shadows: those colours are 'dead' tones and will destroy your shading.

Once the base is done, I work the mood of the composition. I choose to have a very strong light, giving precise and clean shadows. The moon is the main light source and it's really bright, so I add a huge glow all around it and some dots of light all over the scene. Add glow where the light is stronger, and some mysterious elements such as clouds or silhouettes of trees. This will add a fantastic, chilling feeling to the scene.

After working the light, and by adding some details such as clouds next to the moon, this simple scene gains a greater sense of mystery.

Question
Can you help me paint a huge treasure horde quickly?
Marcus Wright, US

Answer
Jon replies

A mound of coins is like any other pile of particles: it's made from big shapes, which on closer inspection are made up of smaller details. If you squint at a hoard of coins you'll just see big mounds. The colours would blur together, too. Gold is the stronger colour so that would dominate.

With large brushes I quickly define those larger forms. Piles of coins look like hills, and I can exaggerate a bit given that this is fantasy. Once I'm happy with the composition I can go in with a lighter colour and a smaller brush and pick out some coin shapes.

It's important to imagine the coins laying on each other, following the forms of the mounds. This can take practice, and his hugely helped by having a pile of coins to reference.

Given the focus on large mounds of treasure, we don't need to worry about details on individual coins. Each coin is a single brush mark.
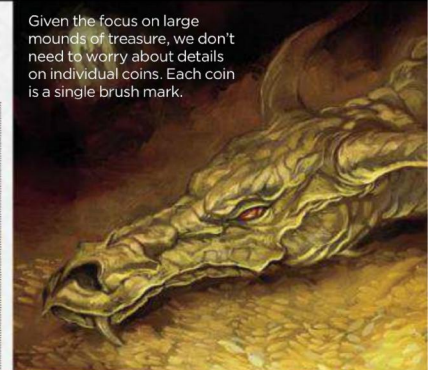
The big shapes of the mounds of coins are quickly made with large brushes. ArtRage is great for this, and its native colour mixing on the canvas really speeds things up.

ImagineNation Artist Q&A

Question
What's the secret to creating believable magical glows and auras?
Mathias Keller, Germany

I painted the magic on top of the item creating it, and used rim light on the objects nearby. This helps avoid the 'cut out' look, and helps tie everything together.

Answer
Jim replies

Painting magic in Photoshop is one of the more enjoyable parts of any job. You can be really spontaneous and try many different things to get the look you want.

One of my favourite techniques is to begin with a Round brush with Scatter scaled up to around 300 per cent, and the Opacity turned down to 20 per cent. I decide what colour I want the magic to be, and choose a fairly saturated mid-tone of that colour. On a fresh layer, I paint around the item that'll be emitting the magic until the colour starts to show. I copy what I just painted, and paste it onto a new layer. I go back to the layer beneath and use the Motion Blur filter to create a nice glowing base.

I return to the layer on top and pick a lighter version of the same hue. With a

textured brush and the mode set to Color Dodge, with the same Opacity of 20 per cent, I move the brush quickly over what I already have. Areas that are repeatedly covered begin to look like crackling magic. Finally, I take a small Round brush that's still set to Color Dodge and bring up some really bright highlights.

Use complementary colours to help your magic stand out. The green magic in this piece helps the blade pop out from the reds of the background.

Artist's secret
FINDING TEXTURED BRUSHES
This is a fun area to play around in. You can create brushes of your own in Photoshop, or go online to sites like www.brusheezy.com or www.brushking.eu and browse through the many brushes available there. Once you've found ones you like, experiment with different brush modes and settings to bring excitement to your magic.

Question
How can create or add emotion to my paintings?
Grace Cooper, Australia

Soft pastel colours give this drawing a calm, peaceful feel; the red lantern acts as a cheerful focal point.
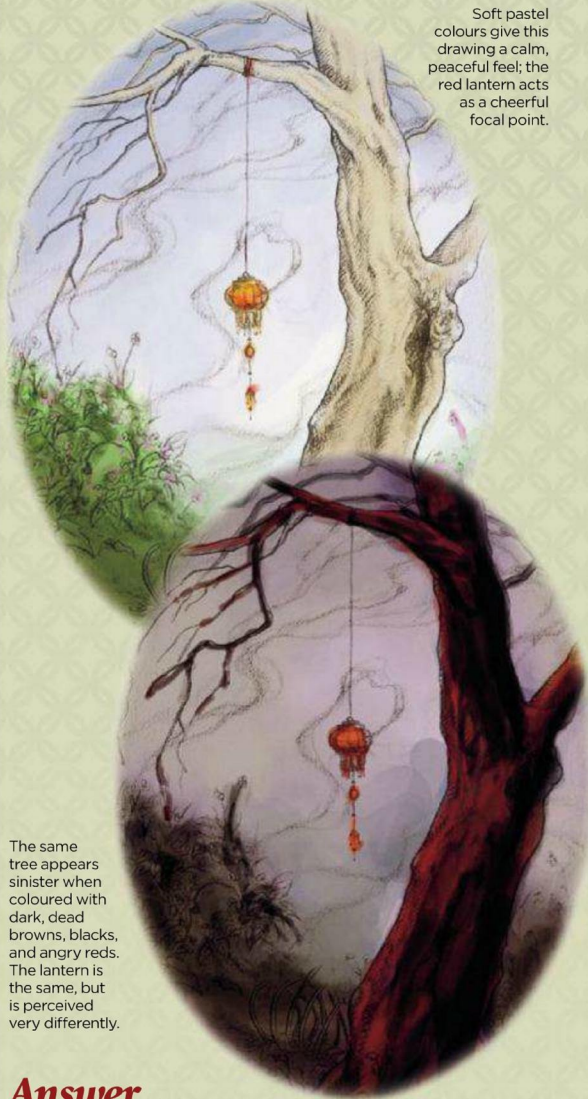
The same tree appears sinister when coloured with dark, dead browns, blacks, and angry reds. The lantern is the same, but is perceived very differently.

Answer
Lauren replies

By using colour! We're hard-wired to react to certain colours in different ways because of what we associate them with in nature, and there can also be a cultural aspect that reinforces these associations. If you look into colour psychology, you'll find that pretty much every colour has both positive and negative things associated with it. How they are perceived or affect an image will depend on how they're used.

Blues and greens can appear benign and soothing in one image, but spooky and surreal in another. The same palette of reds and yellows can be bright and cheerful in one image, and hellish in another. So how you apply colour to push an image's mood one way or another really depends on the image itself.

Still, there are some general colour associations that you can rely on: limited colour palettes are usually more dramatic and moody; warm colours are exciting; red and black are associated with danger while pastels, blues, and greens are usually positive and calming. Saturation and value will also play a part in how a colour is perceived.

Question
Do you have any tips on how to paint a frozen river?
Baz Smithens, New Zealand

Answer
Nick replies

You may be surprised by the variety of possibilities for how a 'frozen river' can look if you Google that phrase. The location, speed, width and surrounding features all affect the actual ice formation. The weather, stage of freezing or thawing, and lighting conditions in combination with the eye level you choose also have dramatic effect on appearance.

The overriding thing to remember is that although the frozen surface may be surprisingly rugged, the underlying plane will be flat and horizontal – effectively the ground/water plane (excluding frozen waterfalls, of course). Ice and snow of differing thickness can offer a great variety of looks.

I'm using ArtRage Studio Pro 3.5 for this image but the principles work within any software supporting layers with blending modes. I paint a narrow, smooth flowing river, offering a relatively flat, frozen surface. I can help describe the plane using the river bank, although it could be partially hidden by drifted snow or debris if desired.

Think about the scene's elements and use underlying features to make your icy scene feel real and frosty.

I doodled around a bit before arriving at the look and pose for the Frost Giant. You can see where I cut off his arm and moved it to a more extreme angle.
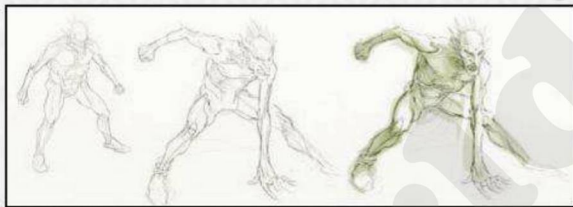
Initially, I work over a blue tinted base to help the mood, blocking in dark areas on a layer over a loose sketch. Objects placed on the frozen surface help to define the plane, especially with a low light source offering longer shadows. Textural elements help reinforce the effect, but remember to ensure that such details conform to the overall lighting scheme.

The lighting also affords the chance to bring colour into the 'white' surfaces if you wish. To add more colour and visual interest, why not have river water visible through the thinner ice?

Artist's secret

USING TEXTURES

I only used one texture stencil for the surface of the frozen river. Here I've loaded two instances of it and scaled the second to accommodate bit of perspective. Try inverting the stencil after you've painted one colour and use a complementary colour to really make it pop.

Step-by-step: Compose an icy, frozen scene

1 The frozen river is just another element in this composition, but I use it to lead the eye to the main focal point, the Frost Giant. I start by blocking in the borders of the plane but resist getting too precious at this stage. There's plenty of time to refine it later on. I use a dark, neutral tone/colour to make it easy to read when I start working over it.

2 Although the shadows in this aren't right yet, you should be able to see how I'm using them to try and help define a flat plane that I can add more interest to later. Be consistent with your light sources for the most convincing results. I use several layers set to Multiply to build up depth, painting larger areas on one and details on the other.
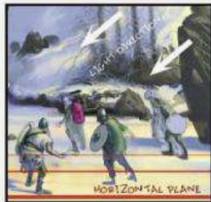
3 I paint through a textural Stencil created from a photo of a stony surface, irregularly transformed to be much wider than tall to add surface interest. I prefer to work this up on a separate layer as it gives me more freedom to experiment, and employ blending modes if needed, Multiply and Overlay being my favourites.

MASTER ART

McFARLANE = AFTER ME.

SPAWN
By breaking away and starting Image Comics in 1992, Todd could create a character that didn't conform to corporate America. Thus Spawn, the occult anti-hero, was born.

SPAWN/BATMAN

Having established Spawn, Todd collaborated with DC Comics on the Spawn/Batman crossover. The first one-shot came in 1994, and a second one appeared in 2006.

THE ART OF
TODD MCFARLANE

For the past six years this comic book and fantasy art legend has been working on The Reckoning, which is proving to be one of the artist's biggest projects of his career...

odd McFarlane wants to clear something up from the get-go. "Because people aren't seeing my artwork as much on a regular basis, they somehow think that I've stopped drawing, which isn't true. It's more concept stuff now," he says.

"Whereas being a comic book artist is very singular, with the things I do in Hollywood or with my toys or with my comics or with the video games, the artwork I'm creating is more for the rest of the group. It's not necessarily for public consumption," he adds.

The latest opus for this prodigious creative talent is an enormous fantasy game for Xbox, PS3 and PC called Kingdoms of Amalur: The Reckoning. Unlike so many other game releases, it doesn't have a III, IV or V after the title. This is a brand new game that Todd is creating alongside the author RA Salvatore (famous for his Drizzt books) and game designer Ken Rolston (who worked on The Elder Scrolls). It's always good when something fresh comes along.

GROUP EFFORT

The Reckoning takes place in a world so sprawling and detailed – RA Salvatore has conceived a 10,000 year history for it – that there's no way Todd could draw ➤➤

FIRE DRAGON

Todd also produces detailed figurines in the sports, entertainment and fantasy genres. This one's from his Dragons series.
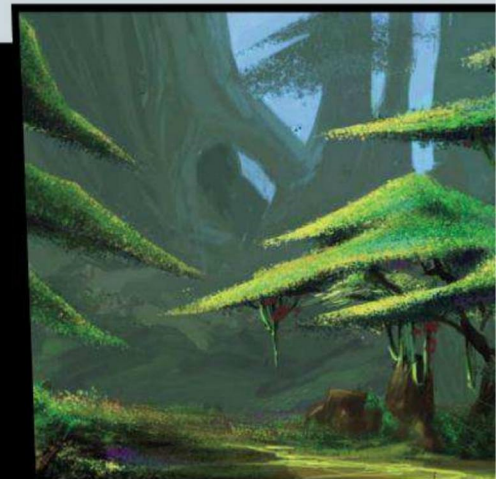
ARTIST TIP

BATTLE SCARRED
This character concept art for The Reckoning, designed by Daarken and art directed by Todd, showcases the game's unique style.

Artwork from The Reckoning © 2012 EA

LESSER NISKARU
Some of the colourful monsters in The Reckoning have separate subspecies. This Niskaru is the lesser of two evils.

BOGGART
The mischievous household faerie from English folklore adopts a seriously aggressive appearance in The Reckoning.

➡➡ everything himself, even if he wanted to. Instead, he's directing 10 groups made up of artists who've been working on the environments, monsters, spells, heroes, lighting, animation and sound effects.

Todd's heaviest influence came early on in the project when the artists were coming up with a wish list of ways to make the game better than any other fantasy experience out there. Then he was doing a lot of drawing, reviewing artwork, and saying 'Wow' or 'Uh-uh' to a huge range of concepts. As everything became more refined, he was happiest when he felt like the dumbest guy in the room, he says, looking at the creations of his teams and feeling like he had nothing to add because they'd thrived under his guidance.

Nearly six year in the making, The Reckoning does have an impressive look and feel. It'll be a single player experience and you can choose to be an Almain (noble human), Dokkalfar (dark elf), the Ljosalfar (light elf), or a Varani (nomadic human). There are three classes (fighter, rogue and mage) and five main regions to explore, each with its own history and inhabitants.

You just start throwing ideas back and forth until you get something that surprises everyone

"As I've grown a little bit older, I actually enjoy working in groups and the reason is, as much as I think I'm a decent artist, I don't feel I have all the answers to everything and I sure don't have the skill for everything," he says. "I like to go, 'Here, let me give you a seed of an idea and you go run with it.' Or them coming back with something and I can go, 'Hey what if you did this?' And then they say 'That's kind of cool, but what if we also did this?' You just start throwing ideas back and forth until you get something that surprises everybody."

The intricate background that RA Salvatore has woven is full of classic fantasy standards. Magic underpins power and politics of this world, and civilised kingdoms clash with barbarian tribes.

MONSTER MASH

There are monsters galore, and some of Todd's favourites are the hefty brutes. "I like big fat dudes, so we've got the Jottuns that have been around for a long time. Then we've got a big red guy called a Boggart. I keep telling them that at some point ➡➡

☠ I was just the guy who came along and put the flames on the Cadillac ☠
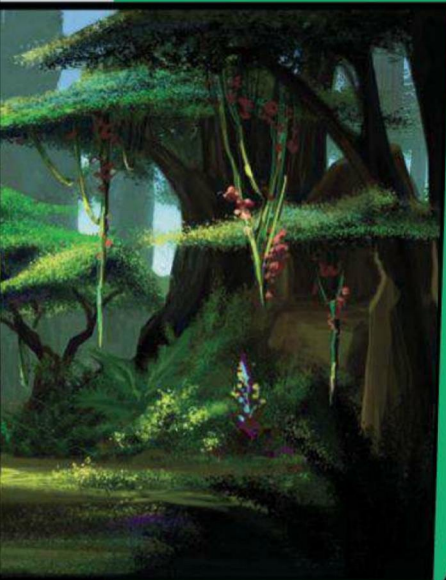
DELENTARTH
Another team that Todd worked with on The Reckoning designed all the environments, such as this forested area, and included artist Sean A Murray. The extensive variety of locations will provide up to 200 hours of gameplay.

FRESH THREADS

When Todd looks back on the highlights of his career so far, he's still passionate about his time working with Spider-Man. "Making a mark on Spider-Man – there's a classic icon and most people didn't want to mess with it," he explains. "Maybe I was just immature and wasn't too concerned about getting my hand slapped, and so I just messed around with it. I don't think I did anything extraordinary with the character – it was just that everybody was in such reverence of the look of it that they all kept it the same. I was just the guy who came along and put the flames on the Cadillac and said, 'Huh? It's kind of boring isn't it? Why don't we bring it into the 90s here and do something interesting with it?'

HAUNT
In 2007, Image launched Haunt, a comic created by Todd along with Robert Kirkman, Ryan Ottley and Greg Capullo.

ROCK N ROLL
Todd has been involved in several music videos. In 2000 the video for Freak on a Leash by KORN won a Grammy and this is the album artwork, also created by Todd.

Figurine images © www.spawn.com

THE DEVIL IN THE DETAILS
Todd's talent is one thing but he puts his success, whether in toys, comics or games down to trying to do things a bit better than anyone else. With these figurines, the emphasis is on detail.

➤➤ we're going to do a whole game of big fat guys pounding on each other," he says.

The emphasis hasn't been on reinventing fantasy or redoing the genre in his own style, which Todd describes as dark, gritty and detailed. The graphics and gameplay sequences won't remind you of the way he drew Spawn, say. There's a lightness and fluidity to it all, thanks to the way he's overseen not just the concept art but the animation, the lighting and the effects.

"As somebody who's supposed to be encouraging art, my job isn't to create little baby Todds, but to make good artists,"

he says. "There are still applicable rules of good art and within those rules you do the best art you can. I look for clarity in the storytelling. Light things so that you can see the objects, give them good silhouettes, and make sure that you're not getting too cute with it. In your animation make sure it feels like there's muscle underneath there instead of robotics."

movie and TV series, the film Torso, and music videos for bands like Korn, Swollen Members and Pearl Jam. And as the head of Todd McFarlane Productions he still oversees the plotline and publishing of Spawn. In fact, after talking to us his next job is to send issue 216 of Spawn to the printers. It's the second-longest running independent comic in history.

As somebody who's supposed to be encouraging art, my job isn't to create baby Todds, but to make good artists

Todd's goal with the art team has been to try and come out best across a range of categories so that as a whole the game is better than anything else out there. Should The Reckoning prove to be a success, it'll be followed by a massively multiplayer version. There's the potential for further sequels, books, comics, figurines, card games and more.

THE TOY STORY CONTINUES
Taking the lead art position on The Reckoning doesn't mean Todd has left the world of comics behind. His toy company is going strong, making figurines based on his own characters (like Spawn, or his Fantasy series); licensed ones like the Walking Dead TV series and Alien vs Predator; and star players in baseball, ice hockey, basketball and American football. He continues to run Todd McFarlane Entertainment, the production company behind the Spawn

"Creating ideas and have them last a long time is really the goal," he explains. "If you can keep it around until ideally it survives you, and you die and people still want to see those characters, then you've sort of done it."

Todd wants The Reckoning to have that kind of impact in the world of video games, too. "I'm hoping that people who have followed my career go, 'Look, when he does comic books there's quality there. When he does toys, music videos and animation the quality's there.' So why would it be any different with video games? I'm hoping that they'll go, 'If Todd's involved I'll go look at it because I think it'll be a solid product, not just because it'll look like Todd's work.' That's impossible when you have the 200 people that have to be on staff when you make the game, and it would be egotistical for me to even try."
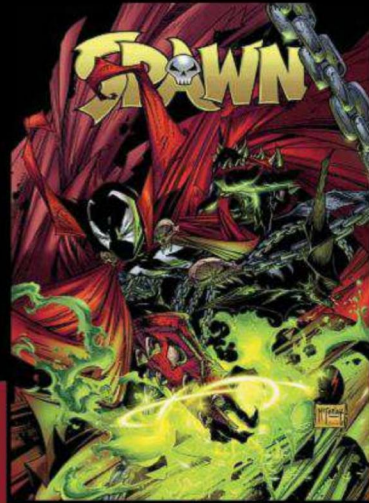
THE BIRTH OF SPAWN

By the late 1980s, Todd had worked on some of the biggest comics, drawing the biggest characters around – Batman, the Hulk, and Spider-Man to name but a few. He's partly credited with the development of super villain Venom as well. Growing tired of creating characters for big corporations, he set up Image Comics with a group of other comic artists. In 1992, Image launched Spawn. It's still going today, and is one of just two independent comics to reach issue 200, the other being Cerebus which stopped at 300.

"In its simplest form, Spawn was, 'What if Batman and Spider-Man weren't controlled by corporate America?' Then you could do whatever the hell you want with it, completely unfettered from a corporation that will go, 'No we can't do that, we don't want to offend people, it might drop our public stock.' I didn't have to worry about that," he says.

BE INSPIRED

Entirely Todd's creation, Spawn tells the tale of a man who sells his soul to the devil, and is unleashed on the Earth where he wreaks his own brand of vengeance in both holy and unholy ways. Spawn was a groundbreaking anti-hero for the new world of gritty 1990s comics, which Todd actually revived from his old high school sketchbooks. It's still going and although he doesn't draw it he still oversees the story and the art.

The artist likens the way he developed Spawn with the way he's now making The Reckoning. Todd has always been influenced by plenty of other artwork over the years, and learns from the best of it. "I can go look at the capes here – I was influenced by that artist. The head, I was influenced by this artist, and space ships I thought that guy did the coolest space ships and explosions. So I sort of cherry-picked all of these things that I used to enjoy from different people when I was younger," Todd says honestly. "What you do is you take two per cent from 20 different guys and you put it into a blender and you spill it out and it becomes the Todd style, right. Now, nobody sees those pieces, even though I know to some extent where they came from."

HELLSPAWN

To the left you can see the covers of issue's 50 and 5. Below, the real bad guys in Spawn, a clown called The Violator and this demonic killing machine.

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ImagineFX
FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART

Sketchbook

Karla Ortiz

One of ImagineFX's 2011 Rising stars winners shares her packed sketchbook with us

Artist PROFILE

Karla Ortiz
COUNTRY: US

Still in her twenties, Karla was born on Halloween of 1985, and has been into the spooky and fantastical ever since. She attended college briefly, before deciding to drop everything and undergo illustration training at The Safehouse Atelier under the tutelage of Carl Dobsky and Massive Black. Since then she's worked for Paragon Studios (NCSoft), freelanced for Ubisoft, and now is a full-time employee at Kabam. Once a week she teaches an illustration class at the The Safehouse Atelier.
www.karlaortizart.com

CREATURES
"These odd creatures were inspired by the movie One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. Specifically Charlie Cheswick, who is always a nervous, sweaty, stuttering wreck."
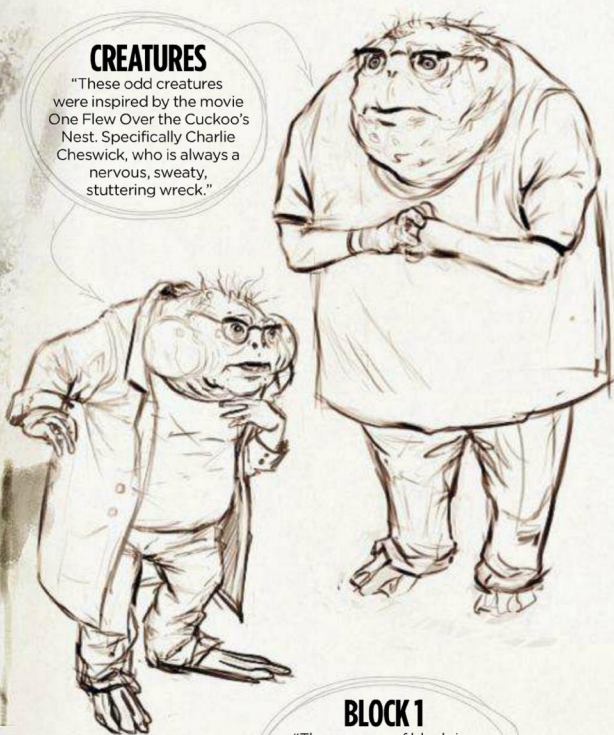
BLOCK 1
"The purpose of block-ins is to teach the student how to draw what they see and not what they know. Hint: the angles of your lines make a big difference!"

FOUNDATION
"Before starting any painting, I always make sure my drawing is as accurate as possible. A good drawing is the best foundation to a good painting."

DOODLE

"I was experimenting with different brushes in Photoshop trying to find out what would work best for a line drawing. I always go back to a simple Round brush with tapered edges, set to 3-5 pixels."

FLIGHT STUDY

"I get bored on airplane journeys, so most of the time I just end up drawing my hands."

SHADOW STUDY

"You always have to stay focused because even a great model will move a little, so the anatomy and shadow shapes are always changing."

10-60 MIN SKETCHES

"Back in the good old days, we used to have a digital life drawing class led by Mr James Kei. All of these sketches took from 10 minutes to an hour to create."

"The purpose of block-ins is to teach the student how to draw what they see and not what they know"
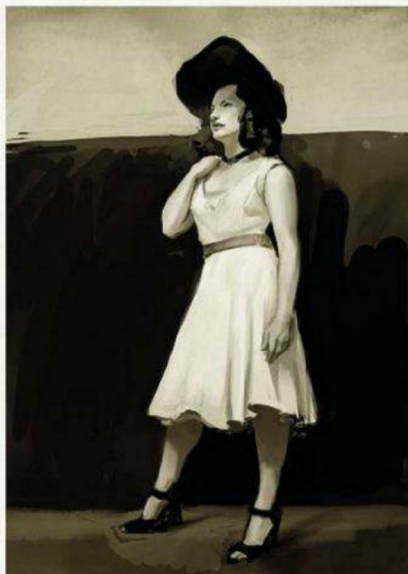
Sketchbook

NINJA WAY
"Company meetings are good opportunities to sketch coworkers. Just make sure you don't miss important information... or get caught!"
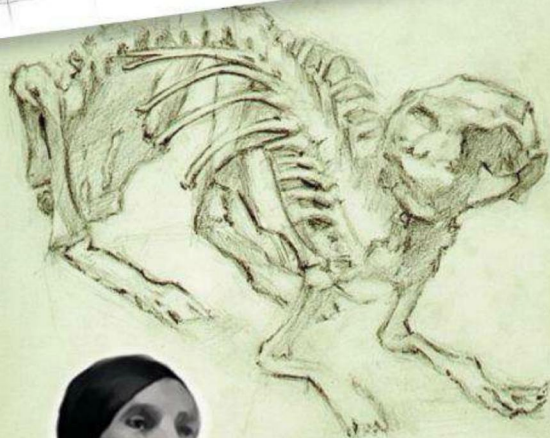
BLOCK 2
"Even back in school I was being taught the value of block-ins, and how they enabled you to draw as accurately as possible. Thanks, Mr Dobsky!"
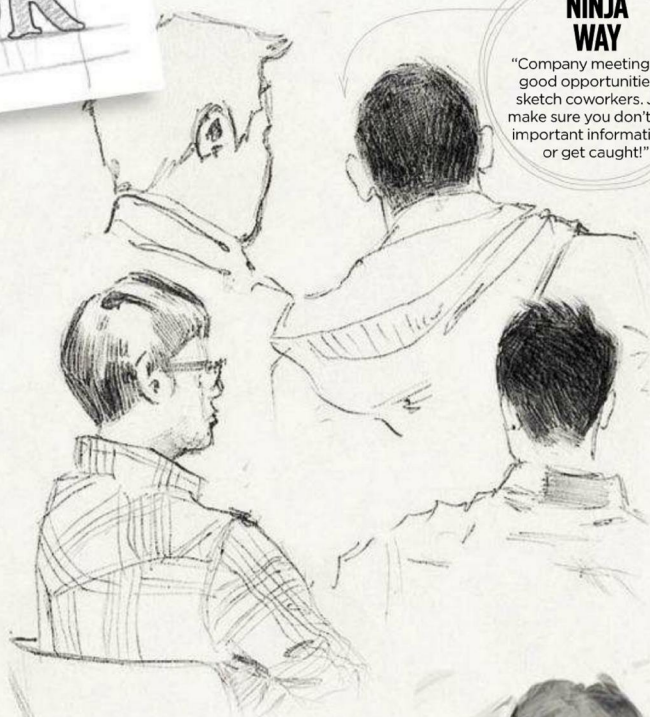
10-60 MIN SKETCHES
"Here are more digital sketches from the classes I took with Mr James Kei."

FIRST HUNT

"This is a small detail shot of the line drawing for one of my paintings. It took a bit of time making sure her eyes made you feel like a trespasser and perhaps, in danger."

"Company meetings are good opportunities to sketch coworkers. Just make sure you don't get caught!"

FEMALE SKETCH

"Another quick digital sketch from life... the woman that is, not the hatching alien"

SKULL

"Sometimes I draw skulls for fun!"
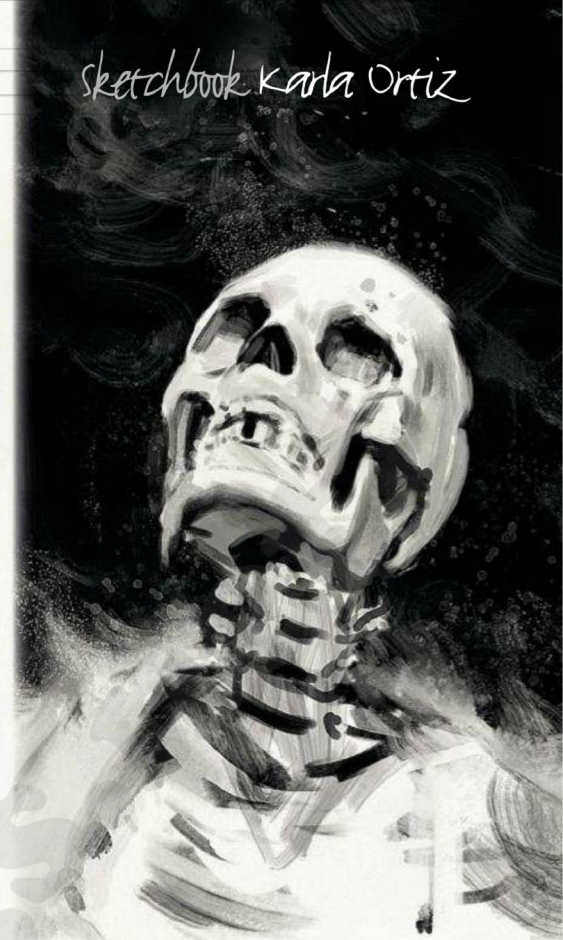
SHADE STUDY

"I used HB pencils, white charcoal pencils and black prisma coloured pencils for my darkest areas on toned charcoal paper. The trick is to use the tone of the paper as one of your middle values."

Want to share your sketches? Then drop us an email, with a selection of your artwork, to sketchbook@imaginefx.com, or upload your drawings at www.imaginefx.com/sketchbook.

❝ Scary and inexplicable things invite us to think, to wonder and to question. I've failed if my art is simply pretty ❞

JEFF SIMPSON

This Canadian creative has a talent for dark, brooding portraits with layers of emotional turmoil

LOADING...

With a rather unsettling body of surreal portraiture work that brings a raw edge to his commercial work, Montreal-based artist Jeff Simpson is nothing if not passionate about his craft. For Jeff, digital painting isn't about being decorative: it's about plumbing the murky depths of his imagination and challenging the viewer.

"I rarely intentionally make things appear dark or brooding per se, but I do try to make my works feel real or true to the viewer," he says. "It's natural that the things we find somewhat scary or inexplicable are more interesting: it invites us to think, to wonder and to question. I feel like I've failed as an artist if a work I do is simply pretty, or doesn't make someone spend at least a few seconds trying to analyse it, or react to it on a deeper level."

Many of his mournful, vacant, often tortured-looking portraits are based on real people. "I always prefer a photograph to base it on, rather than just my imagination. I like to have a realistic style – at least in terms of how I portray faces," says Jeff. "Using references is a huge help to make pieces more interesting: you really are extracting, interpolating and creating information from real life. Sometimes, when creating purely from imagination, it can become limited visually. You're not going to grow artistically without constant fresh sources."

Accordingly, his sources of inspiration change regularly – although there has been one constant: "If I had to choose one inspiration that's drastically changed the way I look at painting and illustration, it would be James Jean," he reveals. "I'd never really seen anything like his work when I came across it in school: for me, the feminine elegance and simplicity of his lines felt very fresh. The way his work could show ugliness in beautiful ways really excited me."

THE LITTLE MERMAID

Back in 2010, Jeff brought his own take on classic tale The Little Mermaid: "The original story is so dark and tragic, that I was compelled to try and illustrate what the character was feeling by the end of the story when she chose to sacrifice herself, rather than kill the prince in exchange for her old life back," he explains.

Splashes of orange and gold punch out from the muted, brownish-grey colour palette that the piece shares with much of Jeff's portrait work. "I set out to have a warm, romantic colour scheme with a simple composition," he says. "I wanted to illustrate her moment of peaceful acceptance with the glowing halo/setting sun, the dark plumes showing her extinguished inner turmoil."

Over the course of his career so far, Jeff's style has developed in various ➜

Artist PROFILE

Jeff Simpson
AGE: 25
COUNTRY: Canada
FAVOURITE ARTISTS:
James Jean,
Ashley Wood
SOFTWARE USED: Photoshop
AVERAGE TIME PER IMAGE:
A few days
WEBSITE: www.bit.ly/j-simpson

THE FALLOUT Other artists asked to model this character in 3D, so Jeff thought, "I'd better do it before someone else does it for me". Close ☒

Gallery
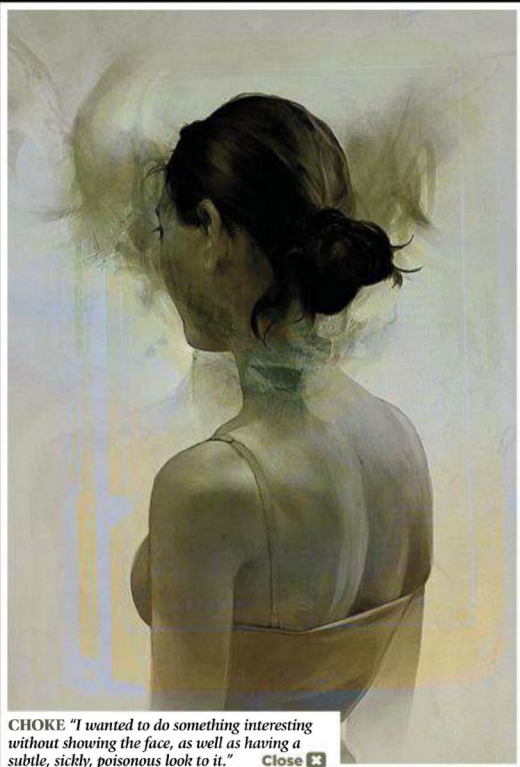
CHOKE *"I wanted to do something interesting without showing the face, as well as having a subtle, sickly, poisonous look to it."* Close ❌

THE LITTLE MERMAID *Perfectionist Jeff takes a critical eye his The Little Mermaid: "The proportions are [a bit] out of whack."* Close ❌

ASSASSIN'S CREED: REVELATIONS

Jeff talks through a recent commission for Ubisoft

"This was done around the time we were putting the final touches on Ezio's new-look costume," explains Jeff, of this striking concept art for the latest incarnation of Ubisoft's hugely successful Assassin's Creed franchise.

"My art director Raphael Lacoste asked me to come up with some cool poses," he goes on. "I came up with what you see here, although we went through a couple of versions based on what weapons he was holding."

Jeff spent around half a day on the piece in total, and found the aesthetic that characterises much of his personal work translated well: "I think the loose, energetic feeling of it really captured the darker, more brooding tone of the game," he concludes. "The piece was officially deemed 'bad-ass', and made its way into marketing and promotional images for the game."

💬 Comments

Cliff Hope
ImagineFX

"I thought that clean look of the white-hooded Altaïr from the first Assassin's Creed game couldn't be improved upon. But Jeff's use of contrasting materials, such as the fur and armour, adds a new dimension to this character."

Remko Troost
Pro artist

"Jeff and I often cross paths and we worked together recently. He's a very talented artist, and with his Ezio image has managed to take the character to another level, which isn't an easy thing with such a well-known game."

Cecilia Watters
Reader

"What I like most about Jeff's work is the overwhelming sense of character in his portraits. Often classically posed and beautifully rendered, there's a hint of the metaphysical and a feeling of spirituality... but are we observing the portrait or is it observing us?"
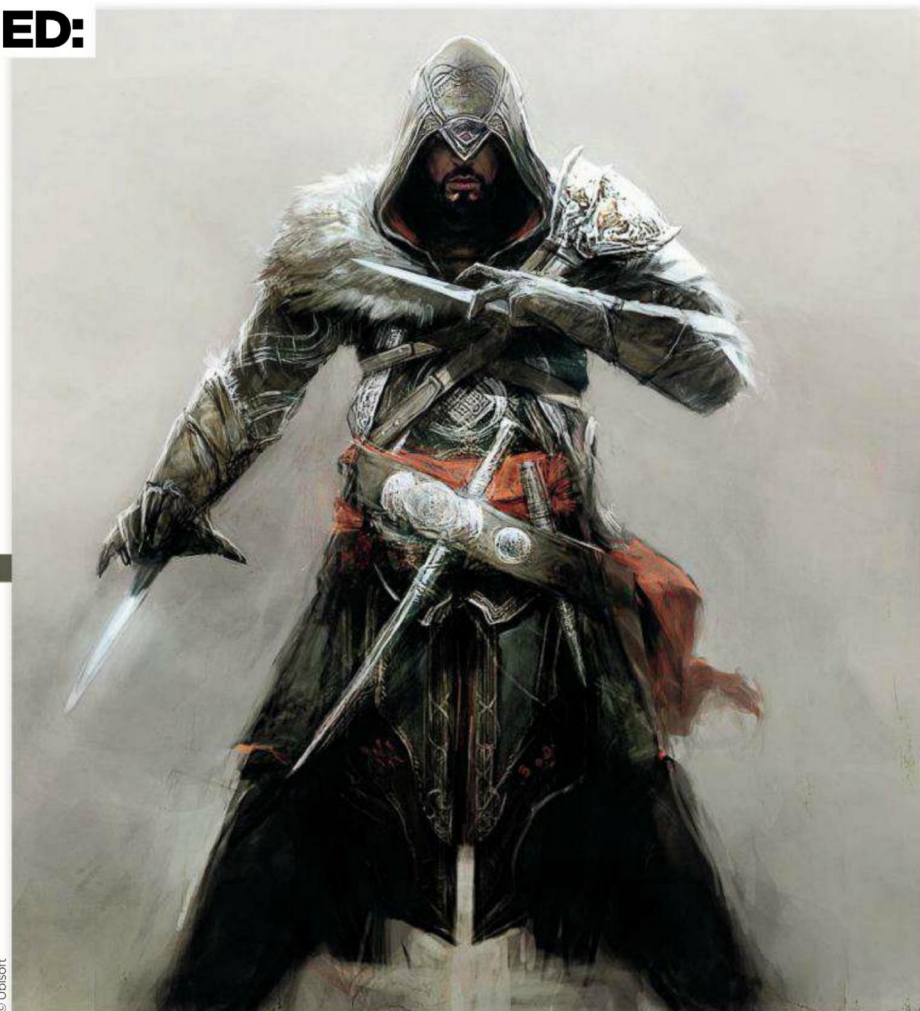
© Ubisoft

JEFF SIMPSON
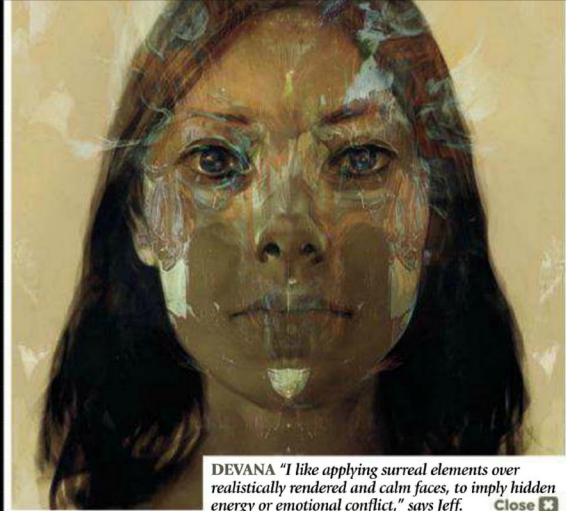
DEVANA *"I like applying surreal elements over realistically rendered and calm faces, to imply hidden energy or emotional conflict,"* says Jeff. Close ❌

KUDU KNIGHT *London inspired Kudu Knight:* "I loved the city," enthuses Jeff. "I based the face and helmet on a ceremonial guard." Close ❌

different directions, although the sense of dark beauty that pervades his paintings was present from an early age. "My older works were much more rooted in fantasy or sci-fi, but usually with a very macabre element." This, he reflects, was largely down to the fact that he hated his job at the time, and channelled this frustration into creative energy instead.

GETTING NOTICED

"I filled my portfolio with concept art-type work to get noticed in the industry, and hopefully a cooler gig," he continues. "Luckily for me, that worked out, and once I moved to Montreal to work for Ubisoft my personal work began to develop into a more individual, experimental and unique style." While he generally keeps his personal and commercial work separate, certain elements cross over. Recent painting The Fallout, for instance, has a style more akin to his concept art work – albeit benefiting from greater freedom to experiment.

"I like trying to capture a character's mood and attitude, instead of focusing on specific little details that are not essential to convey who the character is," he explains. "I'm a fan of gritty, post-apocalyptic junk punk; I get to play with great rusty metallic textures and cloth. I like things that look lived in: layers of history caked onto things."

Although he studied animation at Emily Carr University in Vancouver, Jeff developed digital painting skills in his spare time, trawling the likes of deviantART and CGTalk for inspiration. In 2004 he bought himself a Wacom tablet and took up digital painting full-time.

"I can't really say whether I've mastered the medium itself – I don't know if that's possible, since it evolves every year with new techniques and technology," he says. "However, I did come up with a rendering technique that I've now been using for many years: I've become extremely comfortable with it, for better or worse."

For Jeff, it's his personal work that really defines him as an artist, and he hopes to dip a toe into the fine art pool at some point. "I find the idea pretty terrifying, as I'm very unfamiliar with how the industry functions," he confesses. "But I think if my personal work became my actual work, I would be a happy man. Maybe it would completely ruin it for me, but I'd like to find out for myself first."

While he sometimes struggles to find time for digital painting outside the day job, Jeff rarely goes for more than a few days without firing up Photoshop when he gets home. "It's extremely important for me to keep doing personal work," he insists. "It may not pay the bills, but it's what keeps me alive." ●
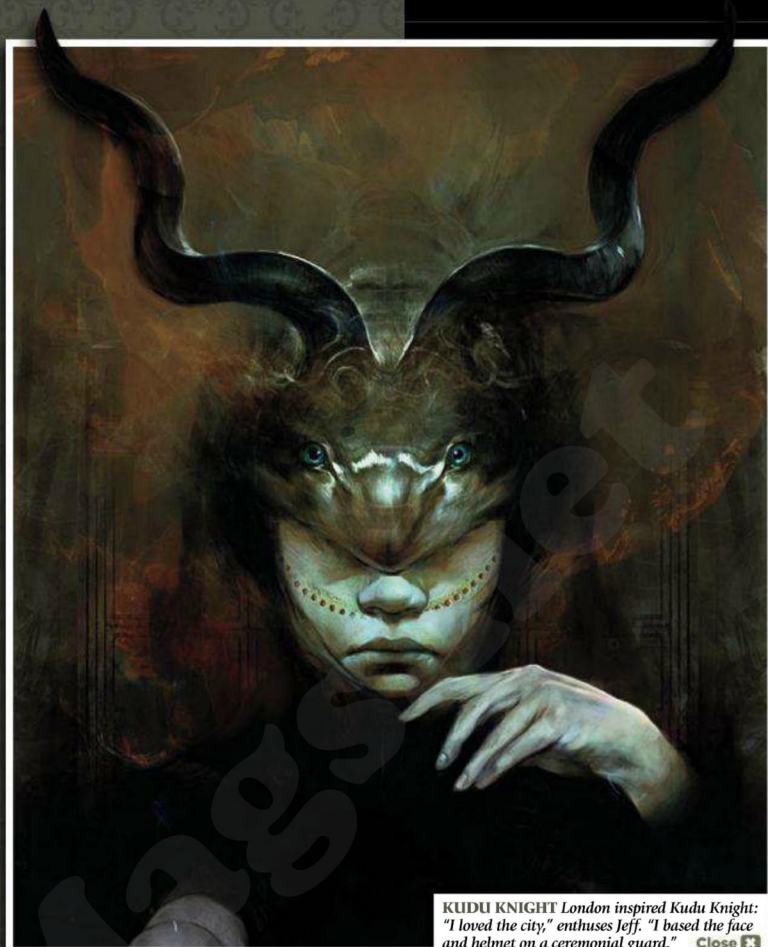
FAERIE *This was Jeff's attempt at something more refined and elaborate.* "I'm perhaps a little too obsessed with symmetry," he says. Close ❌

Gallery

Development sheet

PROJECT TITLE: MECHANICAL MAN

Designed as an entry for IDW Publishing's 100th challenge, **Hoi Mun** set out to interpret his mechanical man as a sports star of the future – and ended up with a fearsome robotic American footballer

Artist PROFILE

Hoi Mun
COUNTRY: Malaysia

A concept artist based in Malaysia, Hoi is busy working full-time for video games studio Storm Lion, which is affiliated with Radical Comics, based in the US. When he finds the spare time – and the energy – he also works on various freelance concept designs.
www.hoimun.blogspot.com

Early draft
This is the first draft of my Mechanical American Football player. I want it to have a tough, almost tank-like feel to it. I begin by drafting an outline and then add a simple grey tone.
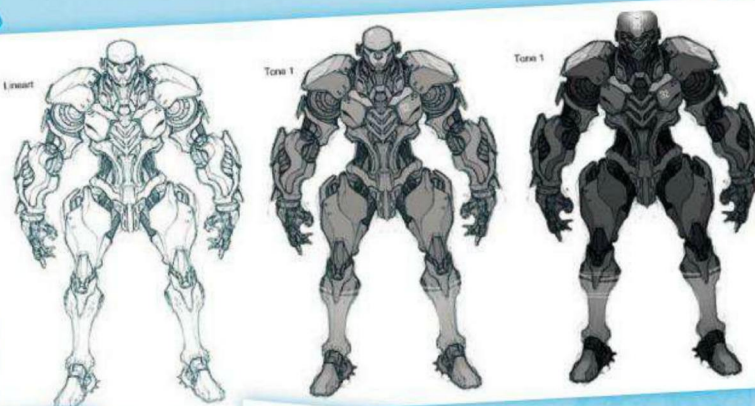
Develop the design
I render the design further, with more tones. I think the current design (top row) is a little too rigid: the shapes are too clunky and need to be more athletic. So I explore more aerodynamic shapes for the armour (bottom row). Now the overall design feels more organic, which visually suggests that this character is more agile.

Human inspiration
I explore some different organic/fluid shapes for the armour. Some of the torso designs shown here are inspired by the human rib cage.
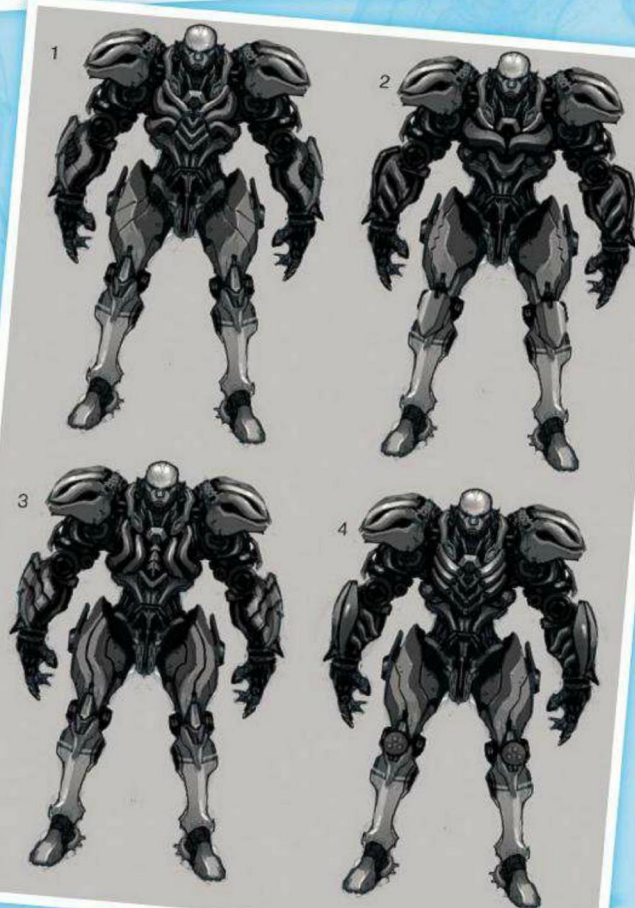
Orthographics

Add colour
Next up, I decide to take design #2 to the final stage, which means blocking out the final orthographic and deciding on the best colour theme for the character.

Strike a pose
This is the final 'beauty shot' of the character. I give it a classic athletic pose to push the American football idea further.

FXPosé Traditional

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL FANTASY ARTISTS

🇺🇸 **Olivier Tossan**
LOCATION: US
WEB: www.oliviertossan.com
EMAIL: olivier.tossan@gmx.net
MEDIA: Acrylic

French artist Olivier has little time for the word 'illustration'. Perhaps it's his master's degree in set design, or having worked for 10 years as an architect, but he far prefers describing what he does as work. "I see what I do as building sets, and think the term 'illustrator' is very negative," he says.

Olivier lived in Berlin for 12 years as a freelance artist, all the while developing his personal style. "It was then that I realised animation could gather all my professional activities into one focused point," he says. Soon after Oliver was hired by DreamWorks Animation studios as a visual development artist and moved to California in October 2010.

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"Olivier's work as an animator for DreamWorks shines through: clear minimal expressions, and a broad colour palette that doesn't distract but ties everything together."
Beren Neale,
Staff Writer

1 ROOSTER
8.22x10.8in, acrylic

"I was returning from a trip with a friend to the southwest of the US, driving from Albuquerque to Las Vegas in 2005. I was living in Berlin at the time, and this cowboy vision came to me, as well as an urge to test new shapes. I consider this picture as the start of the process that's taken me from Berlin to Los Angeles."

2 OCTOPUS
9.8x10.6in, acrylic

"The idea for this drawing came after watching and re-discovering James Cameron's The Abyss. I also love depicting shapes under water. This picture is part of a batch of images created for my portfolio that was sent to the studios in California."

3 PAFF, THE MAGIC DRAGON
8.2x15.3in, acrylic

"This image is of the same group as The Abyss – part of the last portfolio that I sent to the studios. After watching DreamWorks' How To Train Your Dragon, I remembered the song Paff, the magic dragon, as performed by Marlene Dietrich in German. Combined with the unforgettable experience of diving in the Australian Great Barrier Reef in 2002, I was inspired to create my friendliest nature environment. Every colourful fish seems to smile at you!"
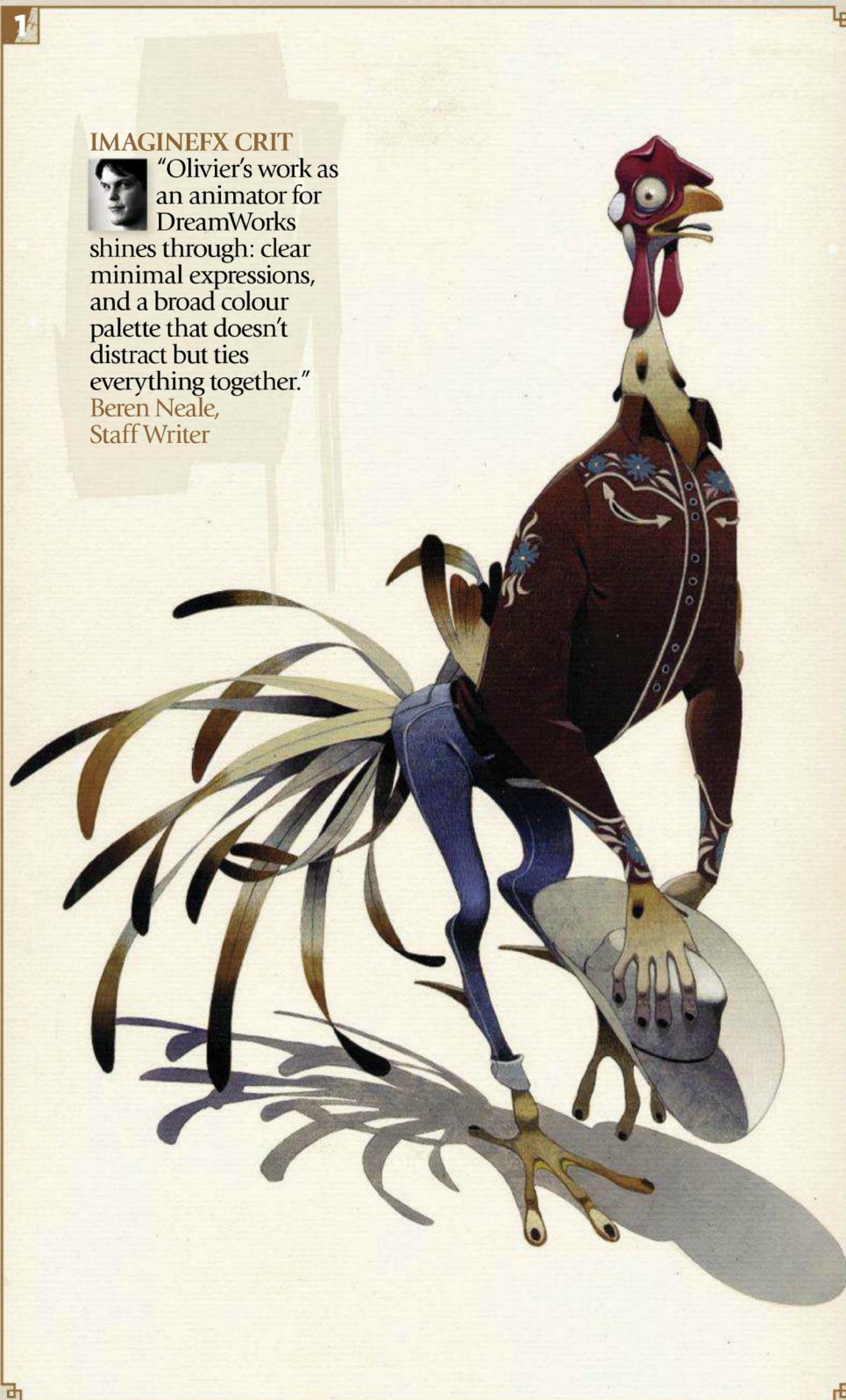
🇦🇺 Linda Catchlove

LOCATION: Australia
WEB: www.lindacatchlove.com.au
EMAIL: lcatchlove@adam.com.au
MEDIA: Watercolours

Linda began her artistic career in graphic design, then spent a decade working for the Walt Disney Animation Studios in Sydney. Add her love of botanical art and you get her whimsical fantasy art.

"My main passion is for Australian native plants, insects and of course my little faerie folk," she says. "I'm fascinated by the close-up world of the botanic and insect subjects, and I strive to capture their character, detail, beauty and design as accurately as possible using my own collected and photographed specimens for reference."

Linda has been involved in various exhibitions including Botanica, The Waterhouse Art Prize and Spectacular Tree Stories. While she continues to paint her original works, she also sells her range of limited edition art prints and greeting cards.

1 BANKSIA
27.6x13.4in, watercolour
"The Banksia genus is native to Australia and comprises over 75 species of plants. Each species is unique in its own way, displaying a variety of different leaves, flower spikes and seed pods. The flowers produce nectar, which attracts a variety of insects, birds, mammals and (in this painting), a bunch of exploring and curious faerie-folk."

2

2 DROOPING SHEOAK
11x13.8in, watercolour

"Native to Australia, this species consists of individual male and female plants. A couple of characteristic features of this small tree are the needle-like weeping branchlets and the cone-like woody fruits that contain small seeds, which are a favourite food of the Glossy Black Cockatoo. The faerie's wings are those of the Australian Painted Lady butterfly."

3 A SPOT OF LUNCH...
11.8x10.2in, watercolour

"A ladybird's picnic with all the trimmings! Aphid cupcakes, salad, cider and even lollypops for the kids! What more could a ladybird ask for?
This piece was a private commission. I was asked to paint 'a ladybird's picnic'. It was lots of fun to create and my favourite bit is the plump ladybird lying on the leaf with a very full tummy."

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"It's good to see Linda going the extra mile to present her lovingly detailed art. The field guide approach really sells the idea of faeries living among real-world plants."
Cliff Hope,
Operations Editor

3

SEND US YOUR ARTWORK!

Want to see your traditional art grace these very pages? Send your work to us, along with an explanation of your techniques, the title of each piece, a photo of yourself and your contact details. Images should be sent as 300dpi TIFF or JPEG files, on CD or DVD. All artwork is submitted on the basis of a non-exclusive worldwide licence to publish, both in print and electronically.

You can also email submissions for FXPosé. Bear in mind that files must be no more than 5MB in total, or we won't receive them.
fxpose@imaginefx.com

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Advice from the world's best artists

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This issue:

Photoshop
CREATE A STRONG SENSE OF ACTION

Sometimes your imagination has to be reined in. **Daarken** puts together a dynamic image while working within the parameters of a magazine cover

P ainting an illustration for the cover of a magazine is always a challenge for an artist. This is because you're going to have to work around a layout that just happens to be the primary advertisement for the publication. It's a battlefield that's strewn with the bodies of text, graphics, secondary illustrations and the inevitable barcode. Obtaining a basic layout for the cover you're working on is crucial so that you can plan around the text and create a readable and exciting image.

Another challenge is that, for the most part, you need to create a simple and bold painting to make it read and play well with text overlays. If you get into a complex painting with a lot of things going on in the background, you may end up not being able to read those all-important cover lines – the short, punchy sentences that grab the attention of a potential buyer. Now that you have a simple, strong, and readable image in your head, how do you go about maintaining movement and excitement on the cover?

Artist PROFILE

Daarken
COUNTRY: US

Daarken is a freelance artist working in the gaming industry. Some of his clients include Blizzard, Wizards of the Coast, Fantasy Flight Games and Crytek.
www.daarken.com

The brief for the cover required a knight - not a medieval knight, but some type of fantasy knight that didn't fall into the usual, realistic look of an armoured warrior. Most magazine covers feature a static character looking awesome, but this time ImagineFX wanted to inject a bit of dynamism into the pose. Challenges continued to stack up.

In this workshop I'll discuss how I addressed these issues and how you can create a successful illustration within the parameters of your client's requirements.

1 Draw thumbnails
Single figure action poses can be tricky to pull off without any supporting elements to tell the story. They also usually require a lot of page real estate because the figure is probably going to be wielding a weapon of some kind. I want the figure's head to break the ImagineFX logo, so the figure needs to be fairly large. I don't usually produce any thumbnails ahead of time, but this time I need to play around with the figure and composition to put together something that meets the client's brief.

2 Not that one!
One of the dangers with showing thumbnails to a client is that they'll inevitably choose the one I like the least. It's possibly because the art editor has a better vision of the final product than I do. In the end, you're not creating an illustration for yourself, but one that needs to meet the vision and requirements of your client. Don't ever forget that. Part of the challenge of an illustrator or a concept artist is to take something you don't like as much and turn it around into something that's cool.

3 Correct the sketch
I start to refine the chosen painting of my character. Usually when I'm working with clients I start out in black and white first, because it enables me to produce sketches much faster then if I were to kick things off in colour. I work zoomed out and I try to block in the main shapes with large brushes. At this point in time I'm not worried with small details and I don't even have the design of the character in place. All I'm focusing on is getting the composition and proportions correct. ►►

4 Make refinements to the design

The sketch stage is usually just for the idea. As I'm refining my painting I nail the pose and the design. It can be tough showing clients sketches because I usually don't have all of the information in the sketch phase. It's just a form of visual shorthand that'll help me take the idea forward. I start adding background elements and some loaded edges to make the piece more interesting. I extend the hammer so that it breaks the picture plane. For the background rocks I create a new layer and use the Marquee tool to fill the area with a gradient. Then I make sure Preserve Transparency is turned on and add some texture with one of my texture brushes. This way I don't have to worry about painting outside of the lines.
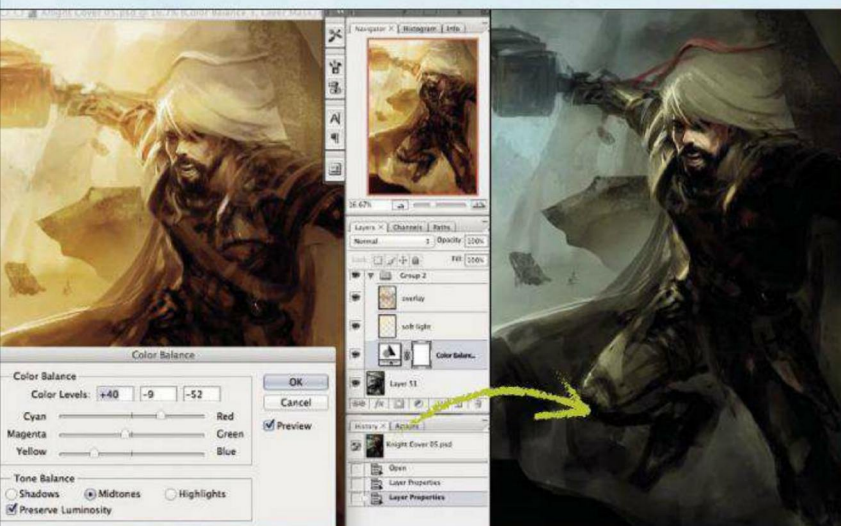
5 Add colour

I create a Color Balance adjustment layer to add an overall desaturated orange hue to the painting. Then I place a Soft Light layer above that and start to block in more of the warm colour palette with another Overlay layer on top of that, to punch in some of the light. I feel that I'm retreating to my comfort zone by creating my typical warm colour palette painting. I'm keen to move away from that and push myself to create something a little different. So I start over and go with a cool background that contrasts well with the warm shades in his face and armour.

6 Edit the colour palette

Adding colour to a black and white painting can be tricky and time-consuming because people usually don't spend long enough painting opaquely on top with colour. Instead they just want to add colour in one or two layers using Color or Overlay layer modes. Adding colour isn't a one-step operation, but rather a long process that only starts with layer modes. I use layer modes to apply the base colour scheme, and then continue to work up the colour palette using layer modes, adjustment layers and opaque painting.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: CHAIN MAIL BRUSH

I use this brush for painting large areas of chain mail.

CHALK BRUSH

This brush is great for knocking in large planes and giving your painting a bit of texture.

CLOUD BRUSH

Aside from painting clouds, I also use this brush for painting fog and mist.

ROCK TEXTURE BRUSH

After I paint the main rock shape I use this brush to add some texture and form.

ROUND BRUSH

I use this brush a lot for painting pretty much everything. If I'm not using the Common brush or the Chalk brush, I'm using this brush.

THE COMMON BRUSH

A new brush that I just got, which I've been using for pretty much everything now.

7 Brighten up the knight

I want to punch up the blues and greens so I knock them in opaquely and then continue to add colour using Soft light and Overlay layers. I already know that the warrior's going to be wearing armour, but I also want to give him a little colour by adding some red strips of cloth and a blue cloak.

8 Dare to bare?

In an attempt to stay away from a medieval-style knight, I start to give the warrior a Highlander look. Perhaps having bare legs will help break up some of the dark space? From my experience as a character designer I know this can help introduce interest and variety to the character. However, it ends up being too much. His muscular legs take too much attention away from the focal point, which should be much higher up, around his face. Illustration and concept art are two very different monsters. Something that might work for a concept artist might not work for an illustrator and vice versa.

9 Quick chain mail

I usually stick with basic brushes, but there are times when I like to use custom brushes to make my job easier and faster. For example, my chain mail brush is great because it helps to quickly create large areas of chain mail. To make your own, simply draw three "c" shapes, create the brush and then go to the brush controls and make sure Angle jitter is set to Direction under Shape dynamics.
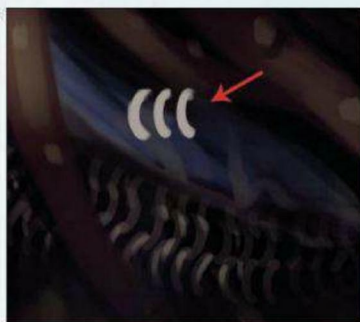
10 Make changes

One thing that's almost inevitable with client work is having to make changes during the painting process. Initially, we wanted the warrior interacting some way with the ImagineFX logo. There was the rather neat idea that perhaps his mace could be smashing the logo, but the size and placement didn't really work because it would obscure a key part of the logo. You can usually get away with covering up the middle or end of a logo, but covering up the beginning is to be avoided. As a result I decide to lower the warrior's arm and change his weapon to a sword.

11 Flow and drama

Maintaining flow and drama can be hard when you start to refine your painting. One thing that can help is to exaggerate your lines a bit. When you think that your pose is pushed far enough, push it some more. I feel my image is constrained by the many parameters I have to work within with this cover. Adding movement is the answer, through supporting elements such as hair, clothing and the environment. Because this guy is jumping through the air, some rocks being kicked up will give the scene more realism.

12 In the details

The painting's now at a stage where the major elements are in place and all that's left is to add some of the final details and continue to refine the painting. Painting armour is always fun for me because I've always loved knights and fantasy since I was a kid. I never like painting pristine armour, so adding nicks and scratches is a great way to add some realism and interest. This is a character who lives and breathes war, so his armour should show that he's survived many battles.

Shortcuts
Configure stylus triggers
Alt+right-click (PC & Mac)
The bottom trigger is set to Alt (Eyedropper), the top set to right-click (Brush palette).

PRO SECRETS
Remember real life
You can never get enough life drawing. Many artists tend to jump into creating creatures and monsters without giving proper attention to the foundations. To successfully draw from your imagination you need to build up your visual library. Even professionals need to keep up with their real-life studies.

13 Atmosphere

Creating atmosphere in your painting is another aspect that'll help you give your painting greater realism. I typically use a few elements that push the mood and atmosphere. The first is atmospheric perspective. Creating depth in your painting can give the viewer a sense that they're peering into a real environment. The trick with atmospheric perspective is to limit your value range as you move back in space. Keeping your different planes on layers can help you further isolate your values. Then just limit your value range on each layer. Dust and debris is another great way of adding atmosphere and realism. Again, I keep the dust and rocks on a separate layer so that I can move them around easily.

14 Final changes

When I'm working on a personal piece it's easy for me to leave certain places a little loose or ambiguous, but sometimes a client may want you to refine every area of the painting. ImagineFX tells me that we need to see the eyes of the knight more clearly – eye contact is important on a magazine cover – so I remove his hair braid. As a last step I'll often throw on a few Adjustment layers to fix the Levels or Color balance, just to give the painting that final touch.

Photoshop

DESIGN A FIGURE FOR ANIMATION

Jason Bennett shows how creating a character for film and video games requires some unique forethought

Artist PROFILE

Jason Bennett
COUNTRY: US

Jason (aka SPIKYTIGER) teaches at the Ringling College of Art and Design, and works as a freelance concept artist and illustrator. His clients have included EA, Take-Two, Ubisoft, THQ and Hasbro.
www.spikytiger.com

This image was created as a demo at the Ringling College of Art and Design, discussing character design and rendering in the Drawing for Animators/Drawing for Game Art course. I was inspired by Maleficent from Disney's Sleeping Beauty, and by an old figure drawing I had lying around.

When designing a character like this, I initially do a few silhouette doodles in my sketchbook, planning the pose and distribution of shapes. I'll consider my character's materials, but early sketches are more about energy and visual impact than anything else. I'll scan things into Photoshop, adjust the proportions and faintly print out my favourite. I go over the print with graphite to refine the design and materials – her dress, face, headdress elements and so on.

Once I have my line work, it's back into Photoshop. I'll often paint a light sphere for reference, and begin to render things in black and white. For colour, I'll play with Overlay, Multiply, Curves, Color Balance and general 'layer magic'. At the end, tossing on some God rays and atmosphere gives the image a little extra sass. Touch things up and she's done!

How I create...
MY TAKE ON MALEFICENT

1 Relationship doodles
I like to start my designs traditionally, doing little doodles in my sketchbook. I try to think of large shape relationships, composition, attitude, my character's materials (they can determine the range of possible forms) and all that fun stuff. When I'm happy, I'll scan it and chop it up digitally.

2 Refine the forms
After I've done more thinking on the digital sketch, I'll print it and redraw on top in graphite, refining my forms slightly. Then I'll take it back into Photoshop for rendering. I like this back and forth work flow as it breaks up the process, getting me to constantly reconsider my design.

3 Keep light in mind
After I have my basic forms delineated, I'll paint a simple sphere to try and keep my light direction fairly consistent. Then I start modelling things out. I begin with the local value, add shadows and find where my terminators on the form are. I generally tend to end with highlights.

Faces, man

I love faces. They carry so much interesting information. Identify your character's dominant traits, distil them into proportion/expression/pose, and go to town! I want her to feel vital, strong and dangerous. Her slight pout/scowl is to show power, disdain and seduction. I'm trying to support the energy of the pose and the design.

Gesture

I look for poses that are quick and clean to read – iconic, even. What's the point of the illustration? To reveal personality, show a cool dress and mighty hips. You should look for opportunities for S-curves throughout. Make sure your hands are posed well. Find the ideal keyframe to explain your story and character.

Transparent dress

I really wanted to do something with a semi-transparent dress. To get the effect, after sketching the basic layout of forms, limits and edges, I go over them with a Hard Round brush, erasing softly on one side with the Airbrush. This is intended to give the illusion of form, as well as hiding stroke edges. Next I drop the layer down, make a new one and repeat the process.

Photoshop

PAINT AN IMPOSING CASTLE

Noah Bradley flexes his lighting and perspective muscles while demonstrating how to construct an epic fantasy stronghold

Artist PROFILE

Noah Bradley
COUNTRY: US

Noah was born and raised in rural Virginia, surrounded by gorgeous mountains and mysterious woods. Now he's an environment concept artist and illustrator working freelance in the game industry – a job where he paints gorgeous mountains and mysterious woods all day.
www.noahbradley.com

A s an environment concept artist and illustrator, it's my job to come up with cool, exciting worlds for my clients. I get to imagine all sorts of exotic locales and then make them. In my own little way, I get to play God on a daily basis.

One of the most common subjects that I'm asked to paint is a castle. It doesn't matter what time period or what mythos: if it's a fantasy project then it's going to have a castle somewhere. So in this workshop I'm going to take you through my process of how I approach an image like this. Hopefully along the way you'll pick up some of my techniques and methods so you can paint your own castle.

Before we get started, I want to say a few words about lighting. When people look at my work the one thing they all immediately notice is the lighting. It's dramatic, epic and it doesn't just happen by accident. From the beginning I'm actively thinking about the lighting: where it's coming from, what colour it is, what's casting shadows. This isn't a tutorial on lighting, but I encourage you to start paying attention to the lighting in your own work. A great place to start would be James Gurney's fantastic book, Color and Light. But for now, let's get to this castle! ➤➤

1 Start loose and rough

I begin the piece with large abstract shapes of colour. I take a large, slightly textured brush in Photoshop and dive in. I'm not too concerned at this point with what all of these shapes are, I'm more focused on getting a pleasing arrangement of shapes. Rendering and details happen later – right now just let go and have some fun. You can start out with a line drawing, but if you're like me you might try and start with shapes instead.

2 Embrace colour

I start my images in full colour. It's perfectly reasonable to start in greyscale and move to colour later on, but I really can't do that. Colour's just too much fun. But I remember how scary colour can seem. When people start rattling off technical terms such as tertiary colour and cross-complementary colour schemes, your head can start to swim. Don't avoid it because it's scary. Embrace it because it's beautiful.

3 Establish your lighting

Don't fall into the trap of using the same, boring top-down lighting in every single piece you do. It's flat, it's dull and there's just no need to do that to your work. Pick a light direction (any will do) and try to imagine how it'll interact with the objects in your scene. Use good reference sources until you can make it up from your head.

4 Get the perspective right

When I begin the piece I just try to eyeball the perspective to be good enough. At this point, though, I start to figure out where things are supposed to go. I establish a horizon line and then draw lines out from my vanishing points. I do this all on a separate layer so I can leave it there while I continue to paint.
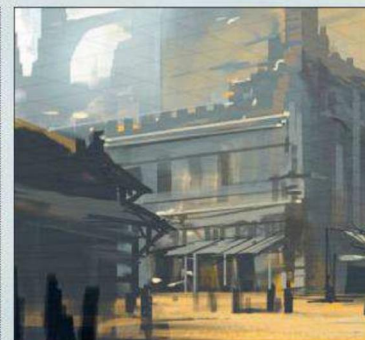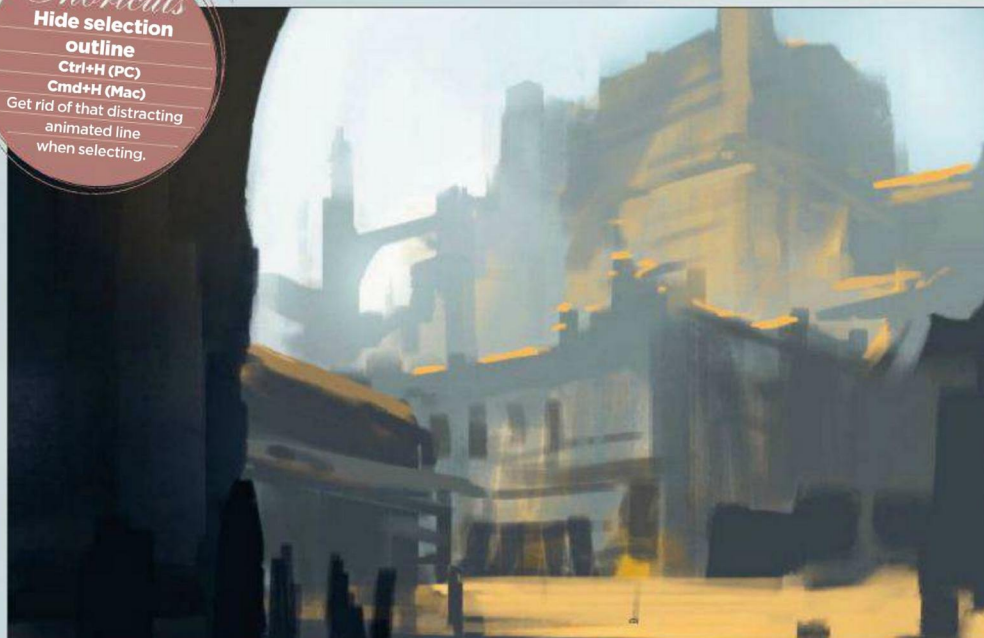
5 From big to small

I start painting with large shapes and then progressively get smaller and smaller. As the shapes become smaller, the details finally start to show up and those random blobs I started with begin to make sense. By starting big I know the major shapes of the composition are working. But now I start to define what those things are. Don't forget: big to small, general to specific.

6 Atmospheric perspective

This is the bread and butter of a landscape painter. Atmospheric perspective can be fairly quickly summed up: as things recede, they become a little bluer, the darks grow lighter, the lights start to fade, the edges soften and the details start to merge. Remember these general rules and you'll suddenly have much more depth in your work. There are exceptions to the rules, but focus on these basics first.

7 Perspective affects everything

It's easy to see how perspective works on things like boxes, but it applies to everything in the scene. I use my perspective grid on the clouds so that I can give the impression that they're going back in space. Robh Ruppel, a fantastic landscape artist, taught me this trick. Try applying your perspective grid to objects like rocks, hills and even water. Perspective is all around us.

8 A bold foreground

With huge, sweeping environments it's easy to get caught up with all of the grand things you're painting. But to make those things seem even bigger you need to have some extreme foreground elements to show just how far away they are. By addi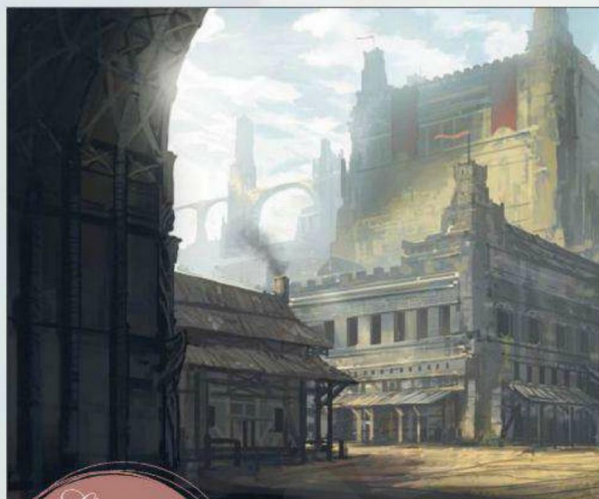ng in some dark foreground elements I not only frame the background, but also provide contrast to the whole picture. Be bold with your foreground – it's okay to cover up some of the background elements.

Shortcuts
Zoom in
Ctrl+Space+Click (PC)
Cmd+Space+Click (Mac)
Quickly zoom in on your painting. I accidentally discovered this one day.

9 Add some colour

Things are looking a little dull at this point, so I introduce some colourful elements to the scene. A bit of red scattered throughout the whole painting adds a bit of extra kick. The colours are somewhat muted in this scene so a little saturation can go a long way. Don't overdo it, though: colour is relative and if I had used pure red here it would have stuck out like a sore thumb.

10 Give it life

When you paint a castle (or a landscape of any kind), the focus is usually on the place itself. But that doesn't mean it needs to be a ghost town. Throw in some signs of life. Banners flapping in the breeze, birds taking flight, smoke rising from a chimney, a crowd of citizens going about their day. All these little touches take the piece from an abandoned castle to a lived-in one.
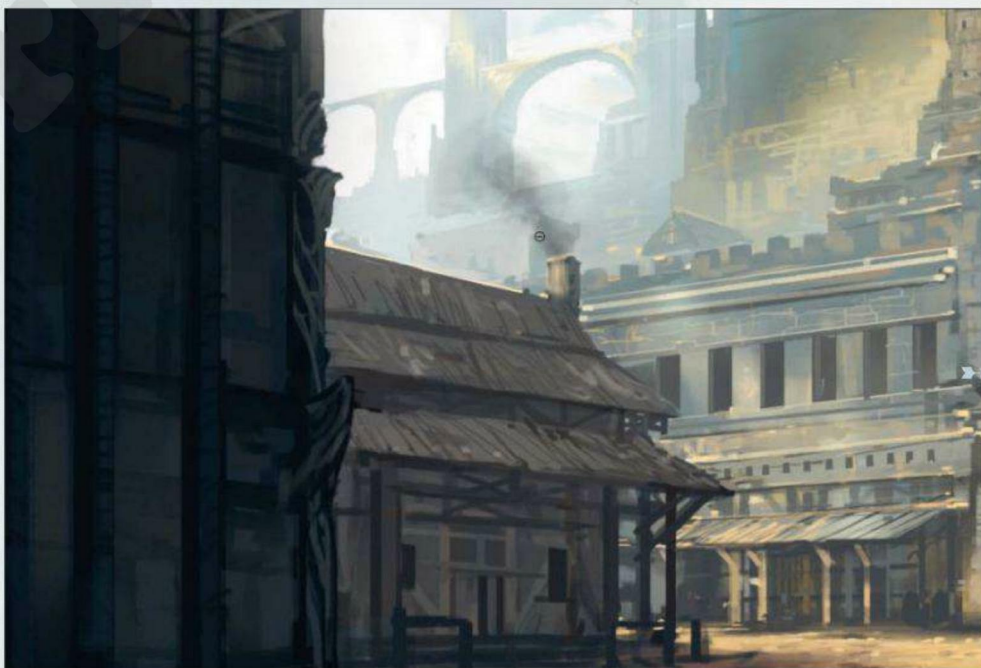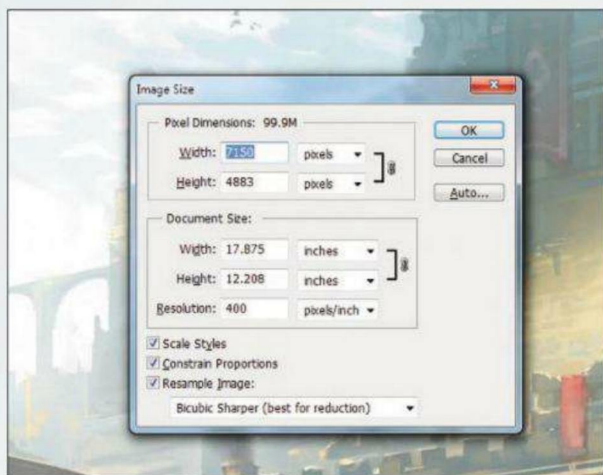
11 Paint big

My general rule is that I paint things as high a resolution as my computer can handle. This image, for instance, is over 7,000 pixels across. Not only does this make the later stages of a painting easy when you're trying to paint all those little details, but also it enables you to print a big copy of your image. So go as big as you can. Things will only look better when they're scaled down later on.

12 Flatten your image

Some people work with numerous layers. I don't. I find it much simpler to work on one or two layers for most of my images. If you find you're spending an inordinate amount of time just managing your layers, you might try flattening things down and making your life a little easier. Who knows – maybe I'm not the only one loves to paint on just one layer?

PRO SECRETS

Flip it

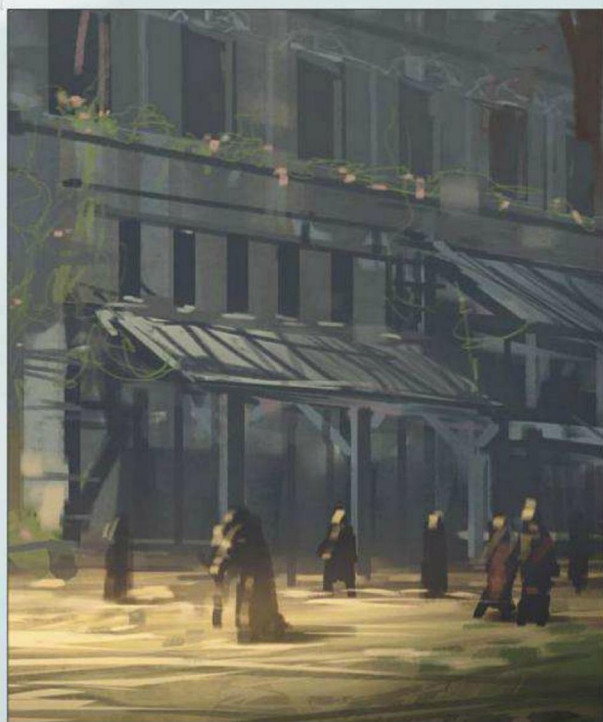One of my favourite tricks in digital painting is to flip the whole image horizontally. When you do this all of your mistakes will suddenly pop out as you get a fresh look at our work. I even took the time to set up a custom shortcut to do just this. Working traditionally? Then invest in a small mirror and check your work every so often.

13 Imply details

One of the great secrets of art is that you don't have to actually paint everything. What a relief! In fact, you can get away with painting very little. Learning to imply details rather than render them to perfection is a skill that you can practise and develop. A little scribble here and there can be a very convincing figure... as long as you don't look too closely.
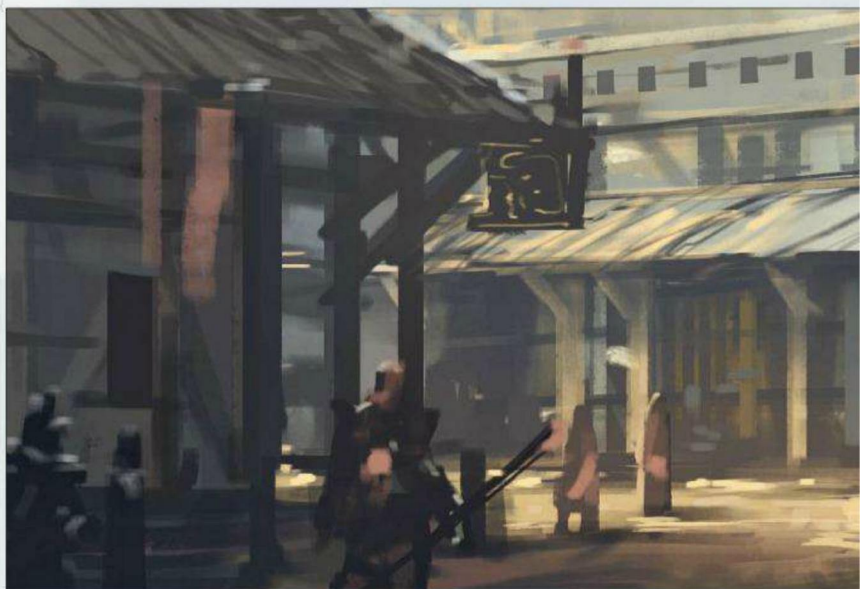
14 Refine and add more details

Now that I'm near the end, I'll try to pick out a few choice areas and put in some details. When you put details on the focal point people will look at those areas and assume that the rest of the painting is just as detailed – even when it's not. Put your details where you want your viewer's eye to go. If an area's not important then you don't need to make it incredibly detailed.

15 Wrap it up

Zoom out and look over the whole image. Scan for things that stick out awkwardly or bother you in some way. Once most of those problems are taken care of, you can call it done. Or you can noodle away at little things for hours on end. It's really up to you. Either way, I hope you've learned something. Send me your paintings – I'd love to take a look at your castles!

Traditional skills
BE BOLD WITH YOUR PEN STROKES

Because of its permanent nature, drawing with ink can be a little intimidating. But practice, says **Terese Nielsen**, leads to confidence

Pen techniques can be as delicate or bold as your temperament dictates. Traditional pen and ink consists of black ink and the white of the paper, creating space through thick and thin lines, and repeated marks for texture.

To get started, pour your ink in an inkwell high enough so that when the nib touches the bottom, it covers three-quarters of the nib. Start with the focal point, working your way back and out to the less-important elements.

The main subject features the bold, heavy lines and has the greatest detail and contrast. Grip the pen close to the tip and keep the angle of the pen at about 45 degrees. Strokes generally start close to your body and move outward. Use your arm and shoulder, not just your wrist.

Artist **PROFILE**

Terese Nielsen
COUNTRY: US

Terese graduated with great distinction from Art Center College of Design and has freelanced for 20 years, illustrating for comic books, Lucas Entertainment, book covers and gaming art.
www.tnielsen.com

1 Tools and materials
There are many options for working in pen/ink, so find which best suits your temperament by experimenting with different tools. Take time to develop your dexterity in pen handling by doing exercises. Learn sweeping strokes, bold lines, crisp dashes, delicate dots, curves and straight lines. Be able to do this vertically, horizontally and slantwise.

2 Blocking and sketching
There are several approaches for laying out a sketch before using pen. Sketch with an HB pencil and erase only after the pen work is dry. Comic book and manga artists often use non-photo blue pencils. Alternatively, lightly sketch with a light-warm, grey PITT pen, or sketch with light washes of ink thinned with water.

3 Tone and texture
It's important to convey tone and the idea of texture. This is done with the type of stroke, or the spacing of strokes, whether they're wider apart or broken up. Each will have its own peculiar feel. With practice, one learns how to utilise tonal line directions and textures to add points of interest, such as a rhythmic sweep, or applying minute differences in the direction and line weight.

TOOLS AND MATERIALS

Ink
Unless you plan to create subtle washes with a brush, use waterproof drawing ink.

Pen and nib
Crow quills offer great nuances in lines, from extremely fine to quite wide marks. They require dipping into ink and can be messy, though. Wipe the nibs off every 10 minutes to keep a clean ink flow.

Brushes
These are preferred by many artists because of the line control that can be achieved. Press down to create thick fat lines or lift almost off the page to create tiny, thin lines. Sizes 1-3 provide great variety.

Brush pens
These are a convenient option and require no dipping. They offer many of the same line and width varieties as crow quills and traditional brushes.

Fine-point pens
These produce hard, solid lines. Some artists prefer them to the soft curved strokes of a brush, but they lack line variation that crow quills and brushes/brush pens offer, often creating a more mechanical, less expressive drawing.

Paper
Use a smooth, high-quality paper. Cheap papers bleed and don't hold up to erasing or scraping with a knife. With practice, kid-finished Bristol Board can add textural interest, but can cause metal tips to skip and stub, too.

Other tools and supplies
Try including in your workflow: an erasing shield, frisket paper, chamois, non-photo blue Prismacolor pencil, templates, French curves, a tooth brush, X-Acto #11 knife blade (scrape away mistakes with the flat side).
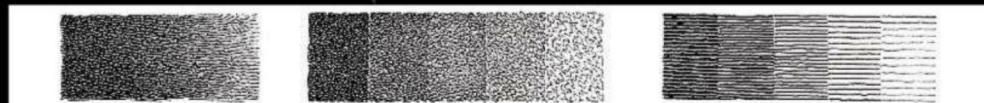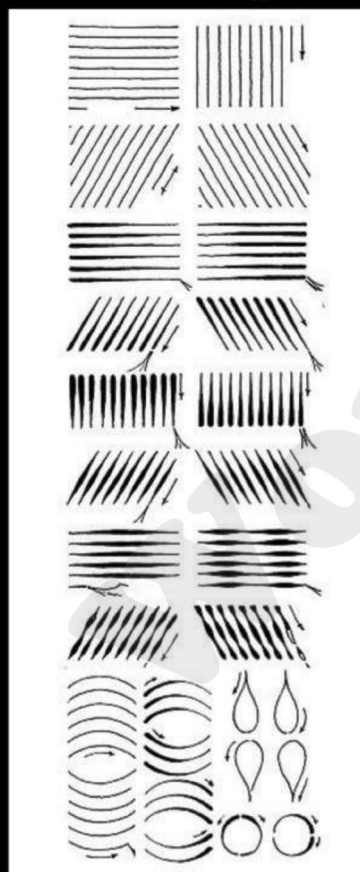
Photoshop

CAPTURE LIGHT AND MAGIC

Winona Nelson makes the most of a real-life reference model, then demonstrates how the right light can evoke a scene of magical drama

Artist PROFILE

Winona Nelson
COUNTRY: US

An avid gamer and reader as a child, Winona grew up dreaming of designing game characters and painting fantasy and sci-fi book covers. She freelances in concept art and illustration, and works on Warhammer covers and card art for Magic: the Gathering.
www.winonanelson.com

When a painter captures light well, it's magical. It takes a two-dimensional image into the realm of three-dimensional space. Good light creates such strong mood and emotion that it takes you away from your thoughts and worries, and grabs your mind for a moment in the world of the illustration.

Painting light well enough to really connect with your viewer requires close observation of the real world, but you can't simply stand in front of a mirror and summon a glowing dragon. We illustrators need to be crafty to create and light scenes of magic convincingly. No matter how otherworldly the subject of our paintings, we can use real-life tools to make our work dynamic and powerful.

The best weapon in our arsenal is the camera. Getting good reference is the first step in taking a sketch and turning it into a fully realised scene. This doesn't require anything too fancy, but spending the time and effort to have a friend model, and replicating the costume and lighting scheme as well as you can, is an investment that pays off in a major way.

Painting digitally can tempt you to try a lot of fancy effects and tricks. Don't let it control you. You need to commit, and to make every decision consciously. Experimentation and exploration can help you generate ideas, but at some point you have to nail your piece down and take the time to make everything work together or the light just won't look right. That's why I keep my files simple and use effects judiciously.

1 Initial sketch

The value arrangement in your sketch is what indicates your lighting requirements. I've decided to surround my figure with light so that she'll stand out from the rest of the image, but I want another light source in front of her to place her into the space. In the sketch I've imagined this as a glowing cauldron, but I feel it needs more drama to illustrate her power, so I end up changing it to a fire.
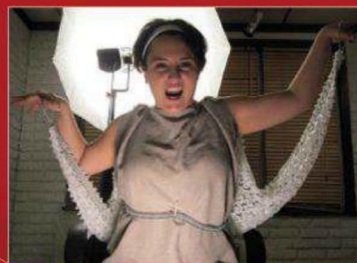
2 Reference shots

I ask a friend to model for me – she's more than happy to pull faces in front of the camera. With my sketch in hand, I replicate the lighting scheme by having the model stand where she'll be posing later, and arrange my lights around her. I use a tall lamp for the back light, and a second lamp on the floor for the light of the fire. You want bright light bulbs, especially if your camera isn't fancy.
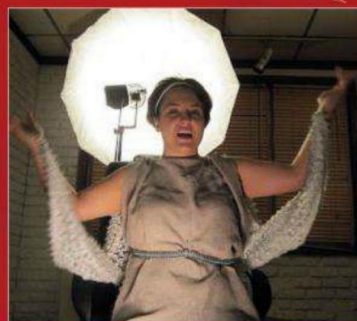
3 Costume elements

Costumes don't have to be perfect. Most of the time I use a bit of fabric and safety pins. I ask the model to tie her hair back so that her face isn't obscured. I also take separate shots with her hair down and combine the photos later. The same goes for capes and other costume elements. Don't attempt to make one perfect shot. Get your elements separately and combine them in Photoshop.

4 Sense of motion

To introduce a feeling of motion and life in the reference, I usually start out by talking to the model about the character she's portraying. I use my sketch only as inspiration. I look for things that look good when the model is in front of me. I try posing the model myself, and ask her to feel and remember where her limbs are. I have her relax, and then move quickly into the pose and take the shot in motion. ➤➤
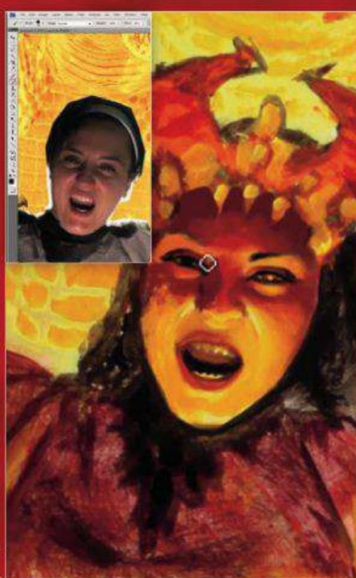
5 Time for some improvisation

After I've got a selection of good shots that are close to my initial idea, I ask my friend to try a lot of different motions. To obtain good facial expressions, I then tell her to go ahead and make noise, because it's hard to fake an expression without making sounds. You can also take video and use still frames for reference. This way you have a lot of options that you can piece together digitally.
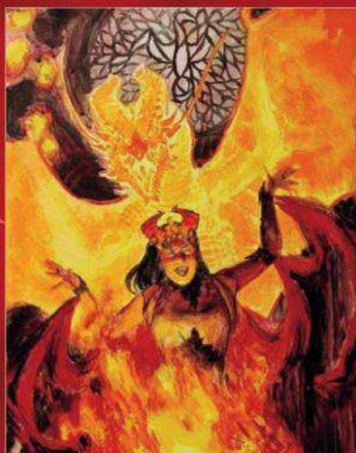
6 Assemble a montage of photos

I go through my photos and select one I'm going to start with. I may pick a photo with a head I like and then grab arms from another. I select the areas I want and drag them into the reference image, while being careful to keep everything in proportion. I use the Polygonal Lasso tool and Free Transform a lot at this stage. You can move the pivot point to make Free Transform easier.

7 Introduce texture

I trace some of the lines lightly for placement, print it on watercolour paper and paint on it with acrylics. I go quickly, using bristle brushes and a dry brush effect, and I don't worry about keeping it neat – messy is good. When I'm done, I photograph it, open it in Photoshop and crop the image to the final dimensions.

8 It's face time

With the reference image open I begin rendering. I often start with the face because it gets me excited about the work, and because it usually takes a few passes before I'm happy with it. I want the sorceress to have exaggerated features, so I apply the darks liberally around the eyes to give her the look of dramatic makeup.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES:
<3

This is my all-purpose brush that's good for sketching, laying in big areas of colour, and rough rendering.
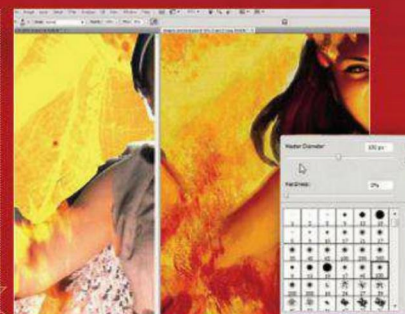
<3 CHALK

I use this in a similar fashion to my <3 brush, but it gives a little more texture. Chalk Dual is the same brush with extra texture, but can be a bit slow. It's used in the painting's fabrics.

<3 HARD LINE

This is a hard, fully opaque brush with the Spacing setting under 10 per cent. It's smoother than the default Hard Round opaque brush. I used it for hard highlights in the eyes and the sequins.

<3 SOFTIE

This is a soft-edged brush with Flow set to 40 per cent. It comes in useful for blending soft areas and painting light blooms. I use it in the skin and the magic glow.

9 Keep it simple

I usually work on a single flat layer. It feels and looks more like traditional mediums this way, and it enables me to paint with my brush in different blending modes. I add layers of flat colour at times and change the blending mode to explore glow effects, but I don't often separate the layers out to more than a few at a time.

10 Light from the fire

As I render soft areas such as flesh, I use simple brushes like a hard-edged Round brush with the Opacity set to Pen Pressure. I keep the light source in mind at all times. In the reference, the light source is a regular light bulb, not fire, so it doesn't have the hot glow that fire does. This means I've got to change the colour of the light as I paint.
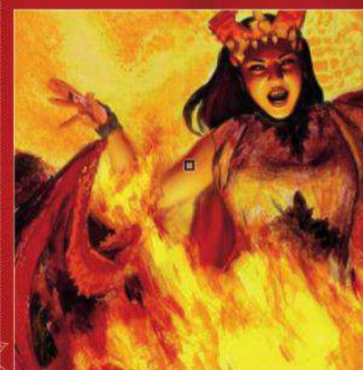
11 Temperature changes

For firelight, the brightest areas tend to be hot orange or yellow, with reds in the middle to lower values and the shadows cooler. I keep the values and saturation highest in areas close to the light source, and let them taper off as it gets further away. Especially when I have a brightly coloured light source, I dampen the saturation or change the temperature in some places, so that the painting doesn't get monochromatic.

12 Think in planes

When rendering form, think about your subject in planes, and the direction that the planes are facing in relation to the light. The planes that are perpendicular are going to be the brightest, with the light falling away as the form turns and as planes become further away from the light source. Once you start to get the form right, it seems to pop into 3D, and then you can push and pull it with value to make the shape look even more solid.

13 The wiggle

To really check if my forms are turning right, I close one eye and wiggle my head back and forth. It might look crazy, but closing one eye will turn your vision from stereo to mono, and wiggling your head keeps your brain from locking down and getting a handle on what you're looking at, so it's easy to trick yourself into converting the screen into a window and your painting into a whole three-dimensional space.
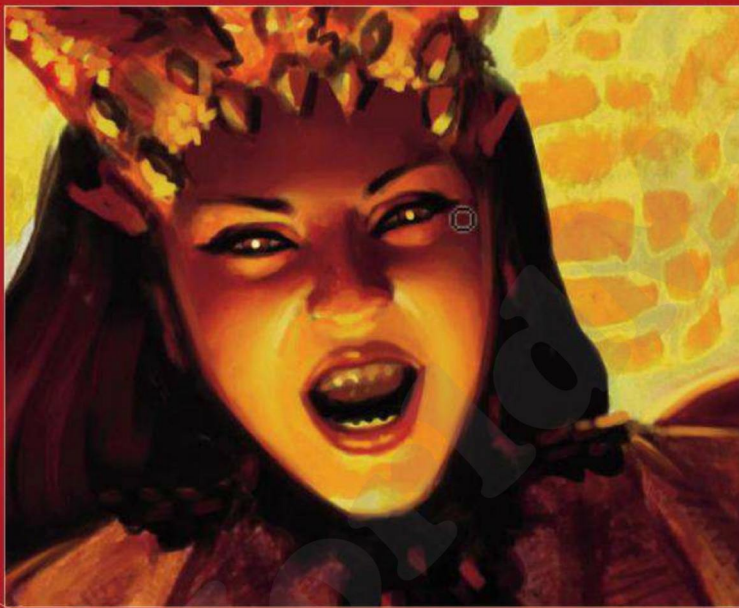
14 Get it right

Because I've lit my figure from below, it's a challenge to make the face look both realistic and attractive. Underlighting can make people look otherworldly, which is why I'm using it, but it can also make them look monstrous. In addition, I've chosen a rather complicated facial expression. Understand where the biggest challenges in your painting are, and hit them hard! Nailing the tough spots makes your work sing.

15 Don't marry the reference shot

Some things look fine in a photo, but wrong in a painting. So, the shadow on her upper lip is important to the expression, but paint it too dark and she has a moustache! Painting the highlight under her nose too bright makes her nose disappear. I simplify the wrinkles on her cheeks, nose, chin and corners of the eyes, but I retain enough to keep the expression.

PRO SECRETS

The Window Menu

In Windows>Workspace, you can save your window configuration and hotkeys. If you've ever had Photoshop freeze and reopen in the default window arrangement, this will save you lots of time. In addition, check out Window>Arrange>New Window for [filename]. You can have multiple views of your image open at once. I like to keep one I'm working on, and one at a smaller view to keep everything organised in the composition, and one on the second monitor to check colour differences.

Shortcuts
Polygonal Lasso step back
Backspace (PC & Mac)
Undo an inaccurate click with the Lasso tool without losing the selection.

16 Finally, add rim light...

I also have a backlight to deal with – another area where a little goes a long way. The rim light is so much fun to paint that sometimes you want to put it all the way around the figure! You have to be careful and pay attention to your reference. The rim light can tell us a lot about the form in the way it's sharp in some places and soft in others.

17 ...and use it well

Just as with the other light source, the rim light will change in brightness depending on how far the surface is from the light source and on the angles of the planes. At the edge between the shadow and the rim light, a little hot red will really make the flesh look convincing. In some spots, you can make the background just a little darker in value so the rim light pops, rather than blending into the background.

Artist insight
ENHANCE YOUR WEAPON DESIGNS

Dan Scott reveals his thought process and painting techniques for depicting the weapons of his fantasy characters. Draw your swords!

Artist PROFILE

Dan Scott
COUNTRY: US

Dan has been a freelance artist for several years, creating illustrations for books, magazines, comics, trading card games, packaging and dabbling in concept art.
www.danscottart.com

I've had the opportunity to paint plenty of weapons in my day. I still have a lot to learn, but I've picked up a few tips over the years that could help you out. In this article I'll get you thinking about ways to improve your approach to weapon painting in your work.

There are a lot of things to consider when painting a hand-held weapon. What type of weapon is it going to be? Who's wielding it and how do they use it? How did they acquire the weapon? How was it originally created? What special abilities does it have? How does it fit into the composition and does it help lead the viewers eye to the focal points or create distracting tangents? Is it shown from an interesting and natural-looking angle?

Asking yourself some of these questions at the outset can help you in creating a weapon that adds to the story of its owner and makes for a more interesting painting.
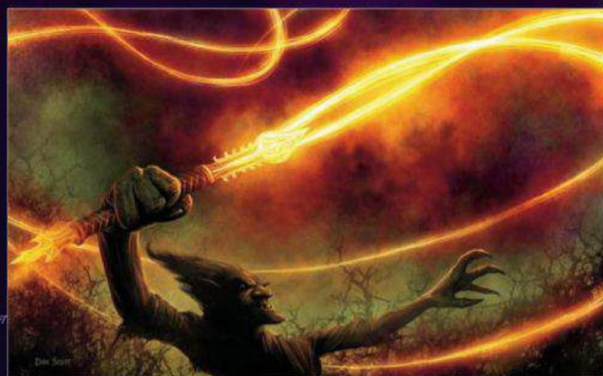
1 OFFENSIVE MATERIAL

What's the weapon made of? It's an important consideration when approaching rendering. A shiny metal weapon should have a high level of contrast and reflect some of the surrounding colours. A leather grip might be duller in contrast and have some frayed edges. A rough-cut weapon may look like it's made of stone, with many cracks and crevices. Perhaps a weapon has a magical aura or parts of it are partially transparent.

2 POINTS OF INTEREST

Weapons can be a great compositional tool, leading the viewer's eye around the painting and calling attention to the focal points. Strong diagonal lines created by weapons can make an image more dynamic, while a curved blade may keep the viewer's eye on the page. Even something as simple as a whip or lasso can be an effective compositional aid.

3 GOOGLE IS YOUR WEAPON

The internet is one of the quickest, easiest and most thorough ways to search for references. For example, it could help me design a unique sword hilt or come up with an interesting colour scheme. One tool I use that helps a lot in weapon perspective is SketchUp and Google's 3d Warehouse (http://sketchup.google.com/3dwarehouse). Sketchup is a free program and there are several great designs for free download in the 3D warehouse. As with any reference, be sure to make it your own and don't just trace someone else's hard work.

4 EVIL NEVER SLEEPS...

One of the funniest parts of getting to do concepts for the Warhammer Online game was designing weapons for Chaos. Those familiar with the Warhammer universe will know that Chaos is the epitome of evil and the only limit when designing Chaos weapons is your imagination. Here I've done my best to experiment with different material types, themes and effects. In general my goal was to make them organic, twisted, and just generally demented.

Ornate sculptural elements can help convey how special and powerful a weapon is.

Runes are a great way to add an interesting design element to your weapon. They can help give a mystical feel to them.

66 **Chaos is the epitome of evil and the only limit when designing Chaos weapons is your imagination** 99
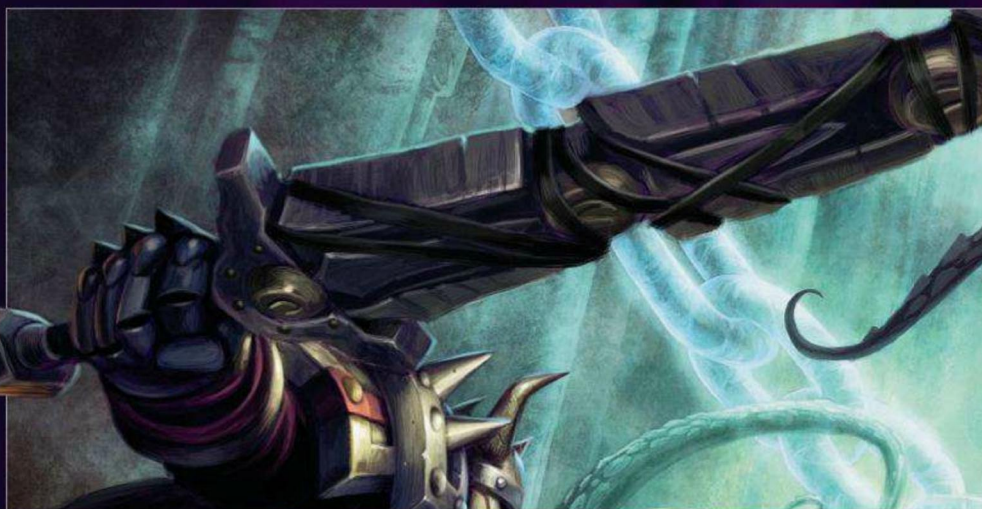
ROUGH 'N' READY

When painting a rough-cut weapon like this I use a more hard-edged brush with a texture applied to it. I also tend to mix in more brown and red tones to indicate dirt, rust, and blood.

5 IT'S A TRAP!

Poorly composed weapons can fatally damage your composition. Tangents are an easy trap to get caught in with weapons. A tangent occurs when lines from two different objects appear to touch each other. This can cause confusion and depth problems. Another pitfall is when your weapon is too vertical or horizontal and divides the image in half. There are exceptions to this rule when you're making an iconic symmetrical composition, but in general it should be avoided.

6 STRIKE A POSE

One giveaway of amateur work is when a weapon is shown exactly symmetrical and parallel with the viewer's perspective. This can make a weapon look static and pasted in. Always try to add at least a little tilt and foreshortening to your weapons. Rotate them or obscure parts of them for added believability. It's extra work, but adds a lot to the piece and can help make an image more dynamic.

> ❝ Always try to add at least a little tilt and foreshortening to your character's weapon ❞

7 MASS EFFECT

Consider the size of the weapon in relation to the wielder. When doing personal work you're free to create whatever type of weapon you think works best, but when producing art for clients you always have to be aware of what type of setting the weapon appears in. Some properties are more historically accurate with realistic weapon sizes and designs. In contrast, most fantasy settings go over the top with unbelievable (and sometimes unwieldy) designs and oversized weapons. Always take this into account when working on a piece.

Symbolism is important in weapon design. It can be used to give a weapon a mood and meaning.

Keep silhouette in mind while designing. These swords are all technically the same thing but have very different shapes.

STRENGTH HONOR
VICTORY JUSTICE
TRIUMPH GLORY

ETERNAL GLORY

8 PRODUCE GOOD WEAPON DESIGN

In contrast to Chaos, The Empire faction is much more orderly, and rife with strong religious overtones. The weapon designs are more symmetrical and the symbolism is very different, with crosses, eagles, skulls, fire and laurels dominating the look. Gold and crimson accent the colour scheme. Even though these weapons are much cleaner than the Chaos versions, there are still signs of wear and tear from battle.

66 In contrast to Chaos, the Empire faction is much more orderly, and rife with strong religious overtones 99

SHINY BUT DEADLY

For a smooth, shinier weapon I tend to use a brush that simulates a real paintbrush and use less texture. Notice the subtle variations in colour throughout the blade.
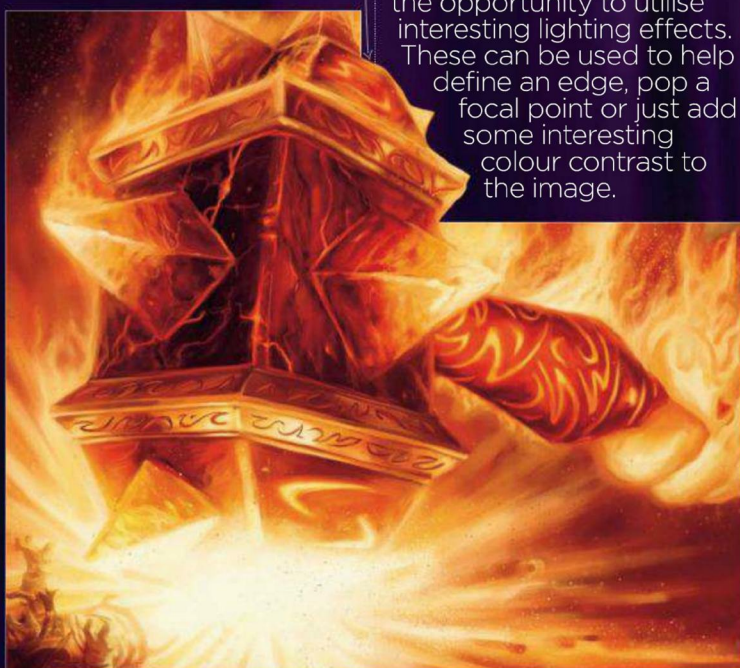
> 66 Chunks of missing metal, scrapes, dirt, rust and blood splatters help sell the effect 99

9 HOW CHARMING

A good way to make a weapon interesting is to add a magical effect to it. It could be a flaming weapon, shooting some type of spell or simply be glowing. When adding these effects I work with textured and smooth brushes. Try not to overuse smooth brushes or the image can start to look overly digital. Having magic weapon effects gives you the opportunity to utilise interesting lighting effects. These can be used to help define an edge, pop a focal point or just add some interesting colour contrast to the image.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: HARD STRANDS BRUSH

This is one of my favourite brushes, not just for weapons but for just about anything. It has a nice natural look while still offering plenty of control.

LIGHT GRUNGE BRUSH

I can't remember how I came across this brush, but it's really good if you want to add a subtle grunge to weapons.

COARSE TEXTURE ROUND

Just a good brush for adding random texture without having to visit the Texture checkbox.

SQUARE WITH TEXTURE

A good, all-round brush that's perfect for detail work and has some texture. I use this one quite often when painting jagged weapons.

10 GET THE KILLER LOOK

Try to keep in mind how a weapon is used. An ornate magic staff of a high wizard would need to look pristine, with a high level of polish and very few blemishes. A crude hatchet wielded by an orc would probably be terribly grungy. Chunks of missing metal, large scrapes, dirt, rust and blood splatters really help sell the effect. Texture brushes and/or texture overlays can help tremendously when trying to get this kind of look.
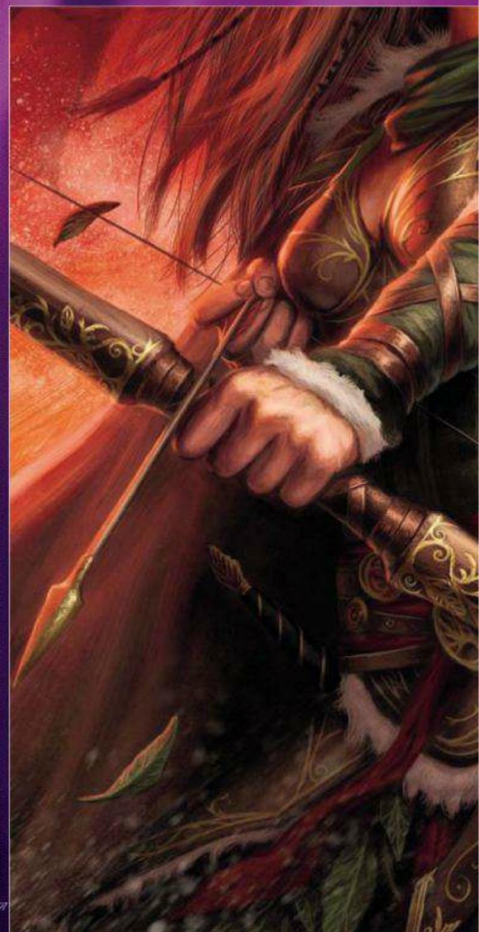
11 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Details are an important part of weapon design. An ornate weapon could have a flowery filigree pattern or harsh zig-zagging runes. It may have either tiny detailed gold intricately woven into the design, or big clunky pieces of stone or metal welded to it. Perhaps the weapon's owner has tied a charm to the hilt wrapped a favourite bandana around the grip, or used notches crudely carved into the blade to denote each kill. All of these details add flavour and interest to how the weapon is portrayed.

sometimes function follows form. Having a sculpted woman for a hilt may not be the most comfortable grip, but it looks cool!

Experiment with symmetrical and asymmetrical designs. Sometimes the best solution is a combination of both.

12 SNEAK ATTACK

These Dark Elf weapons are yet another visage of evil. The designs have an angular intricacy to them, with patterns that are more geometrically complex. The metal even looks to be forged differently and has a purplish blue hue to it. You can tell from the slender forms that these weapons are designed more for stealth and subterfuge than direct mêlée combat.

Next month in...

FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART

ImagineFX

COMIC ART SPECIAL

Give your comic art some punch with
Wonder Woman artist Alex Garner!

ISSUE 82 ON SALE *30 March 2012*

Also...

Mad about comics

Joe Madureira reveals how he creates his mix of manga and western comic art.

Comic colour

How to pencil, ink and colour a comic cover with X-Men's Jorge Molina.

Strike a pose

Hit the perfect hero pose in your comic art with Alvin Lee's workshop.

Work the line

Strike through your creative block with Lois van Baarle's line art tips special.

Alex Garner paints our next cover!
See more of his fantastic art at
www.alexgarner.com

Photoshop
PUT A NEW SPIN ON A FANTASY CLASSIC

Brandon Kitkouski looks for inspiration in real life – including his childhood – to add a new twist, and a story, to his classic fantasy image

Artist PROFILE

Brandon Kitkouski
COUNTRY: US

Brandon was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii. He's a senior concept artist at id Software, working on its current IPs in development. Brandon's spent the past decade working as an illustrator/concept designer in both print and gaming.
www.bkstudio.com

C ould ImagineFX conceive of a more exposing topic? Nothing lays fantasy as an art-form barer, in terms of strengths and weaknesses, than 'classic fantasy with a twist'. How do we take a genre that resides in the deep recesses of the collective unconscious and give it an update without ruining something fundamental about its purpose?

Fantasy artists kneel at the graves of our artistic heroes and pay tribute to their memory by enslaving ourselves to their lifelong phantom apprenticeship. All artists are exploratory by nature; however, our genre keeps directing us towards the same twisted woods, familiar stone architecture and golden expanses that stretch to the sunset/sunrise. How can we, of all artists working today, advance the broader dialogue of art? We seem perhaps the least equipped to deliver a new twist of any sort.

These questions rattle around in my head when faced with the topic of what I have to contribute to fantasy. When viewing this monumental dilemma I sometimes arrive at the obvious defeated response of "nothing". But when I begin working I find I have the same thing to contribute that every artist does: my voice. You've lived a life like no other. The twist is how we choose to string this vocabulary together as viewed through the lens of our unique experience.

I hope to demonstrate through this workshop my meagre contribution towards the advancement of this genre that's usually perceived as immobilised.

1 Mixing it up

One way to head into fresh territory is to mix archetypal characters and see what shakes out of the cross-pollination. I have a vague idea that I want to create a mixture of Medusa and a mermaid. I'm already thinking eels in place of snakes, but during the thumbnailing phase I keep fanning her hair out in broad gestures – I'm intuitively giving the eels a structure to nest within. What if she has a coral crown of sorts that the eels are emerging from? I'm thinking of unusual solutions that I wouldn't have otherwise considered. After creating a number of thumbs I settle on three to develop for this article.
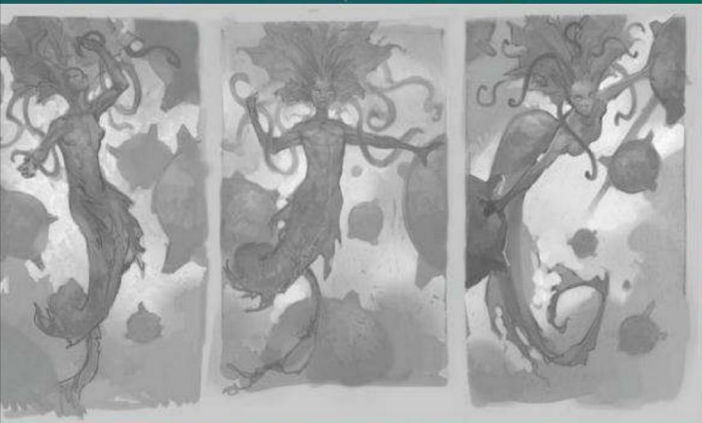
2 Decisions, indecisions

I'm genuinely torn on choosing one character simply based on the thumbs alone, but a clear victor wins out. Each has elements of interest, but the third is the most dynamic and compositionally the most challenging. The others are safe bets, but low on reward. Number three is the composition in which I can't fully gauge its final trajectory and the resulting impulse to chase some exotic new shapes and forms grabs hold of me.

3 A narrowing of approximations

At this point, the greatest importance is the overall statement being made. Once I arrive at general moves I feel satisfied with the rendering, but any detailing before now is wasted if I make any sweeping changes. It's a game of shrinking your target over time, but initially my dartboard is the size of a wall and it isn't until the very end that I concern myself with hitting a bullseye. I keep investment low and the piece fully malleable. ➤➤
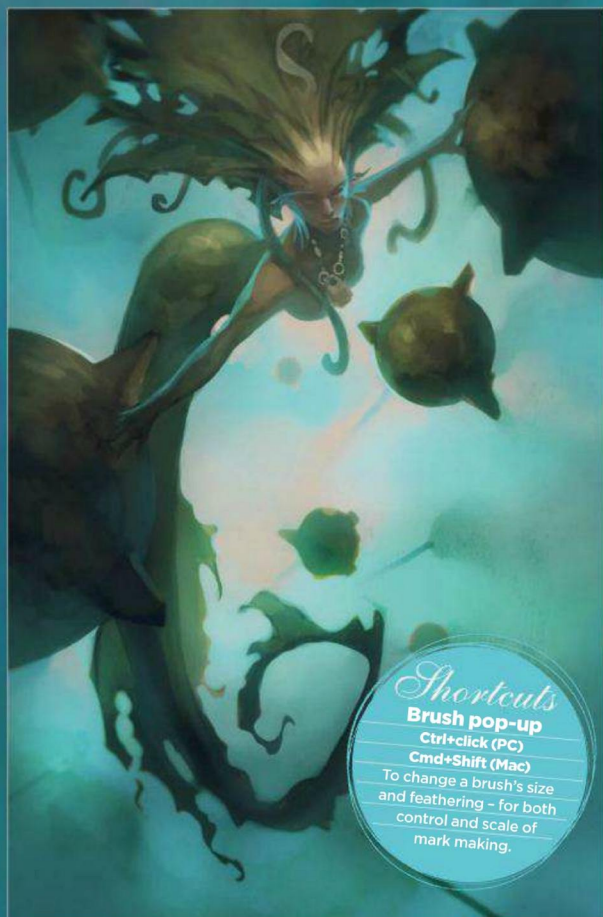
PRO SECRETS

Evaluate the image

Evaluating shape design based on the masks I created during this process is a handy means to quickly gain a sense of whether your elements are sharing their responsibility in delivering a quality image.

4 Colour block out

I begin my colour phase once I feel I've laid out a solid value foundation. I go in and create quick selections of all the major elements with the Lasso tool and convert them to masks. I activate these by loading in the Mask Palette window and then fill them with a colour to set my base temperature relationships. These won't necessarily lock me to a palette, but it does provide the launch pad. I continue to glaze colour on with Overlay, Multiply and Soft Light, until I arrive at a palette I like. I key the work blue-green, but I want those warm punches to the background and her flesh to contrast those elements. It's how sparingly that warmth is used that maximises its impact.

5 Developing a life of its own

I like the idea of her traversing through a field of floating naval mines. Circles I had drawn in my thumbs began to look like mines. It seems wrong for her to have a standard necklace, so I create a design that's more in keeping with hardware trinkets a creature like this may be attracted to. I consider how interesting it would be if she was harvesting bits from the mines themselves – like juggling grenades and with all their safety pins clenched in your teeth.

6 Finding the beat

On my commute I noticed a telephone wire dotted with birds: there were glaring gaps between clusters, yet it felt balanced and right. Nature has a way of doing this and a good rhythm stops an image looking contrived – it engages and interests us. I apply this mentality to all aspects of my image; from the finer design choices of the coral patterning that will adorn her head, to the broader issues of mine and figure placement.

7 Evocative vs descriptive

As her coral crown begins to fall into place I notice another source of narrative tension. She's navigating through a dense grouping of naval mines with the equivalent of a massive stone that could trigger her demise at any moment – the name Tempest occurs to me. She's both tempting fate and if fate obliged her there would be a violent elemental torrent left in the wake of her misstep. Lastly, the composition works like a churning whirlpool, so Tempest seems fitting in all respects.

8 Make a connection

All the narrative beats I've described are inferred and I try to only whisper their connections. You want a piece of art to carry a sense of resonance that will lock the viewer to it. If you dangle tantalising questions before them they'll be fully engaged in the story. I have my own way of making these connections, but I want to afford the viewer their own level of investment and discovery. Our audience is growing in sophistication daily; our art needs to meet an ever-maturing viewer if illustration is to remain competitive with other forms of media. With the elements seemingly coming together, this would be a good time to give some love to other areas of the painting. For example, in this case I want to get some colour into some of those dark shadows…

9 Adjusting the shadows

Shadow patterns in digital painting can get muddy and dull. One way to breathe life into the shadow areas is to use a Lighten layer. For demonstrative purposes, my example here is anything but subtle, but the same idea would apply if I wanted to subtly infuse a little purple into her shaded side. Ensure the value of the colour you're using is lighter than the darkest portion you want to effect, while darker than the lightest portion you want to leave untouched. It's a bit like using an intelligent Color Mask. On the left is the original image, the centre is the purple circle with a Normal layer setting, and on the right is the same purple circle with the layer set to Lighten.
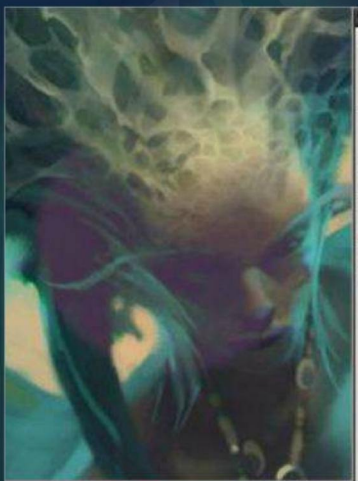
Shortcuts
Undo history
Ctrl+Alt+Z (PC)
Cmd+Alt+Z (Mac)
Use with standard Undo to quickly look through numerous actions.

10 Art imitating life

This image triggers a childhood memory. I was at the beach with a friend, exploring a stash of old piping in the shallows. I picked up a large pipe and as I held it my friend screamed out. I dumped it down at my feet and saw a silver tail whip out of one end, then the other. Something large was circling around inside, deciding the best plan for escape. When the large silvery eel darted out of the pipe towards us I came down on it hard with a stone I had readied. Looking at this piece I wonder about the connection I made that day between the eel, the reef, the rusted hardware, the exotic beauty of my friend, and the abrupt ending to our scavenging trip.
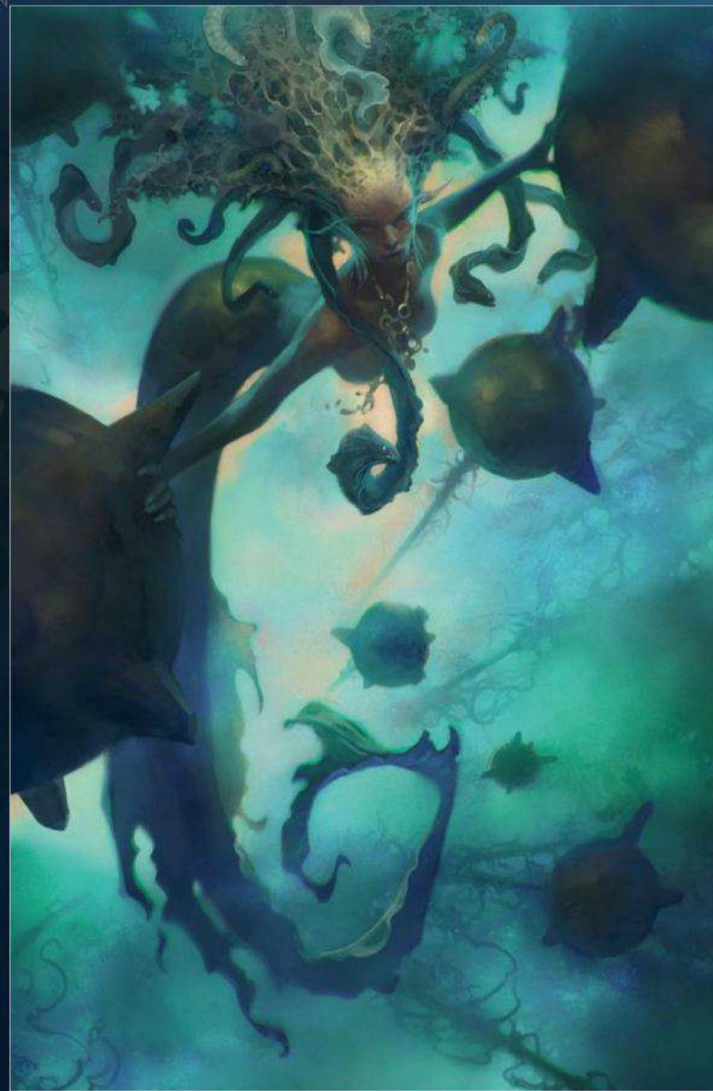
11 Final thought

There's nothing inherently ground-breaking about any element of this image, but all of these narrative beats strung together is as unique to me as my fingerprint. We have a powerful language at our disposal and it only begs that we speak it. To me, it's like Joanna Newsom sang on Sadie: "This is an old song, these are old blues, and this is not my tune, but it's mine to use."

Photoshop
GIVE YOUR ART A TRADITIONAL FEEL

Painting a creature portrait with a traditional look, **Pierre Droal** limits his Photoshop brush options and reveals a few tricks along the way

Today's artists have the largest collection of creative tools at their disposal of any time in history, ranging from the traditional Dutch oil painting set to the latest Cintiq behemoth.

I decided to turn completely digital a few years ago. My graphic tablet and computer enable me to work, and make corrections, faster than I would have ever dreamed possible. That said, digital painting can be a double-edged sword.

All those selection tools, gradient tools, custom brushes and filters can quickly give a picture an overly smooth, sanitised look if not used carefully.

To guard against this, I advise artists to keep an eye on the work of the old masters, who weren't able to use a blending mode to lighten a scene! This is a good antidote to bear in mind and help prevent the abuse of Photoshop effects that characterise so many works of those new to digital art.

If I decide to paint a portrait inspired by the masterpieces of the 17th century, I enjoy wrong-footing the viewer by choosing a subject that won't be found in the work of Rembrandt or Titian, say a saurian creature with fur and tattoos.

So in this workshop I'll show you how I paint a digital portrait of a non-classical subject, giving it a traditional feel by limiting the number of brushes I use. I'll also explain some of my painting tricks that make my life easier.

Artist PROFILE

Pierre Droal
COUNTRY: France

Pierre has worked as a freelance illustrator and comic book artist for French publishers such as J'ai Lu, les Editions du Seuil, Les Editions du Sorbier, Soleil Prod and Dargaud. His images have also been featured in Ballistic's Exposé and Painter, Spectrum and Heavy Metal.
www.bit.ly/pdroal

1 Inspiration

Getting inspiration is sometimes a tortuous process, but in this case a Rembrandt came quickly to mind: Portrait of a Man in Oriental Costume, painted in 1635. Thanks to his delicate use of colours and a simple composition, Rembrandt put his subject forward in a remarkably efficient way. There's certainly a lot to learn from this composition. I also select a few books on African designs and snakes.
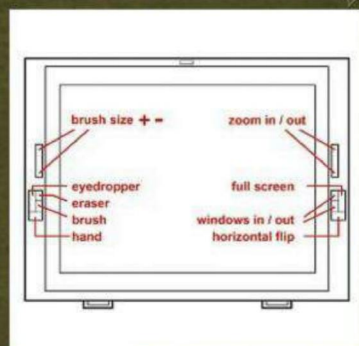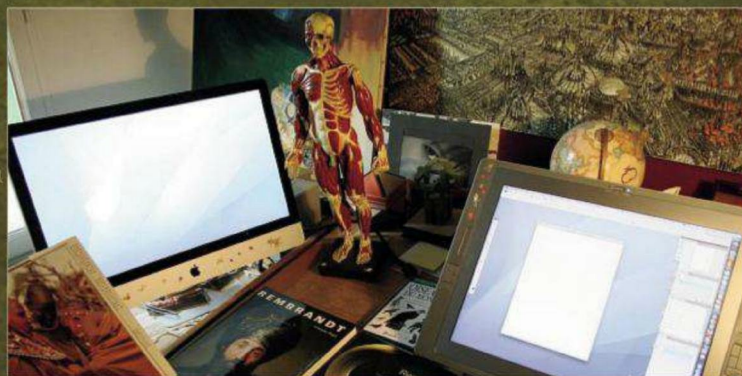
2 Preparation is key

Before starting, I organise my desk so I can work efficiently. I keep the selected documentation and my references close to me. I program every button on my Cintiq with my most-used tools, such as the Eyedropper, Pen and Zoom. I try to use the menus in Photoshop as little as possible; it saves a lot of energy and time. Creative work requires a lot of concentration and I don't want to be distracted by pointless mouse cursor movements.

brush size + -   zoom in / out

eyedropper
eraser
brush
hand

full screen

windows in / out
horizontal flip

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSH: 2B

One from my pencil collection. It's sharp but with a slight edge modulation that adds extra life to my sketches.

PASTEL # GROS

My pastel brushes enable me to paint volume quickly with a nice cracked texture, imitating traditional dry pastels.

H, B & 2B

PASTELS

AERO

PLUME

GRAIN
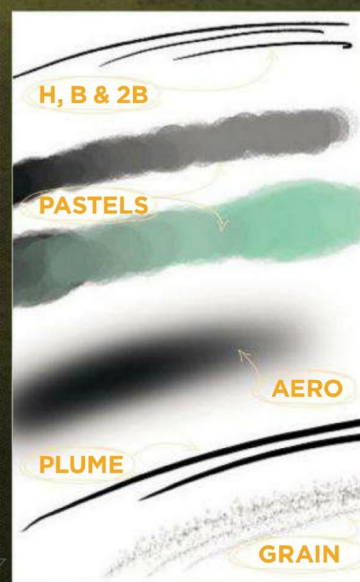
3 My brushes

I line up my brushes: three sizes of custom pencils for sketches; and three sizes of larger brushes that I call pastels. They have 60 per cent Opacity and have a crack texture that, when combined with the Eyedropper, enable me to paint volumes in a rough and speedy manner. I also use a classic Airbrush for final refinements and two basic pens for painting sharp edges. I sometimes use the Grain brush to add a rough texture to the skin of a character.
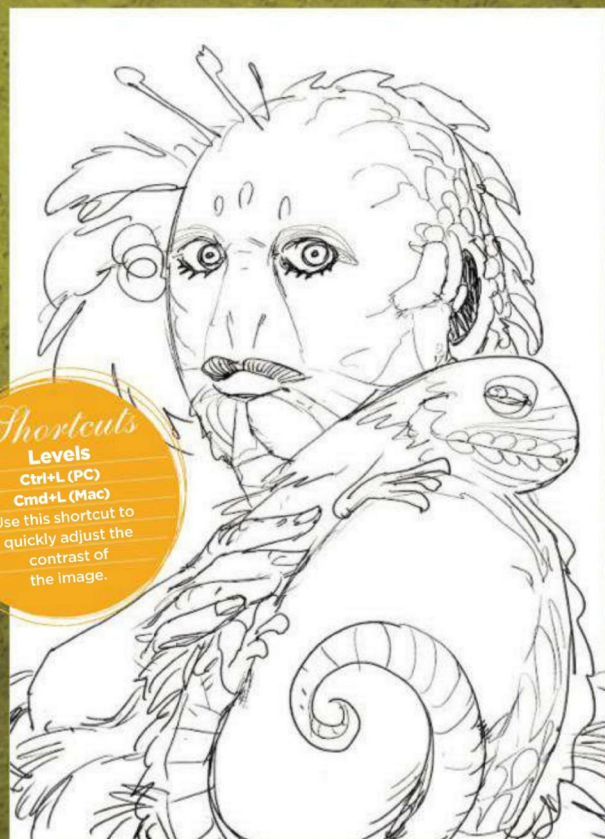
4 First rough

I decide on a simple composition. The most important elements are the eyes of the creature, which are wide open and looking straight at the viewer, giving the scene a sense of immediacy. I also want to maintain a degree of mystery, so I choose a profile pose for her body and obscure it with fur and an odd little lizard, which in itself adds to the strangeness of the scene. Once I'm satisfied with my sketch, I change the Blend mode to Multiply, and lower the Opacity to 10 per cent.
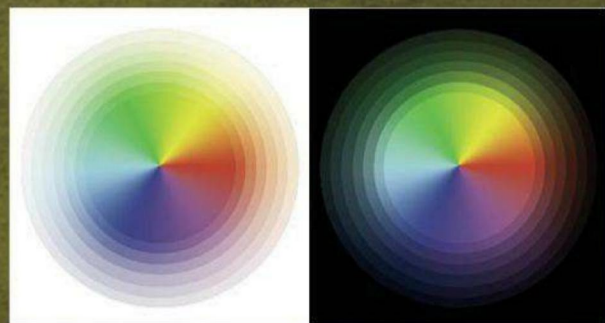
PRO SECRETS

Spotting those flaws

Artists can become hypnotised by their own work, becoming so used to what's in front of them they don't detect flaws, even if there are plenty! Prevention is better than cure, so regularly flip your image to refresh the way you see it.

5 Colour palette

Before using colours, it's important to make sure that they work together. That's why I create my own palette, representing the whole light spectrum. Every time I start to colour a new picture, I choose its background colour first. Then I add a layer to my palette filled with the same colour – green in this case – and I set it to Color mode at 15 per cent Opacity. Now every shade of the colour spectrum I use contains a hint of the green background.
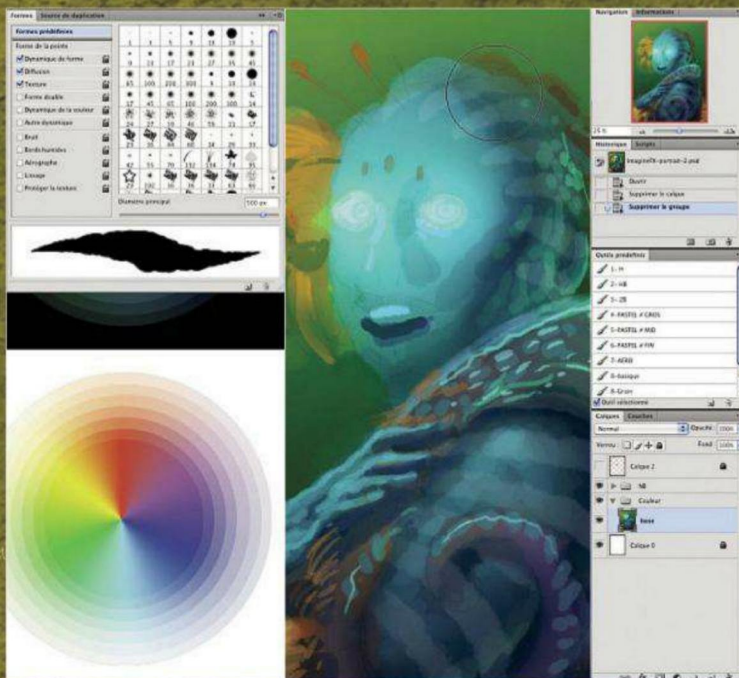
6 First colour scheme

Now I define the primary colour scheme. With Pastel brushes I create the initial shapes and atmosphere of the scene. I want to play with the blues and oranges: two complementary colours that generate a lot of contrast. However, the green background will soften this effect (in the light spectrum, green sits between blue and orange).

7 Refining

With a smaller Pastel brush and the Eyedropper, I start to refine these basic shapes. I concentrate my effort on the creature's face: I darken her eyes to give them more presence and depth. The mouth is the most expressive part of a face along with the eyes, so I strengthen this, too. Notice that except for the eyes, I don't use a lot of black and white at this early stage: I prefer to save them for later on in the painting process.

8 The secondary source of light

On the back of the creature's head, I strengthen the second light source to add some contrast to this area. I dare to burn a few small areas with white but in doing so I keep this part a bit rough, too. Its role is to underline the volume of the subject, not to distract the viewer from the main focus: the creature's face. In addition, the rough strokes give the impression of a slight blindness caused by the light.

9 The eyes and mouth

Now I focus on the eyes and the mouth. I hope they look alright, because if they do the rest of the composition will fall into place. But if not, the portrait will remain unsatisfactory, even if I paint the most opulent jewels or tattoos on her neck. I need to feel the presence of the character, because that's what will give me the motivation to continue. For this job, I need both precision and subtlety. My Airbrush is the right tool for that.

PRO SECRETS

Fill that space

When I have an empty space to fill, I usually prefer to use my brushes. This gives a hand-made, more pleasing impression than the smooth, sanitised effect produced by Photoshop's Fill and Gradient tools. However, these tools do come in handy when I make colour adjustment with low opacity layers in either Overlay or Color Blend mode.

10 Retouching the face

At this stage I'm satisfied with the eyes and the mouth, but there's still something wrong with the face. It's the snake-like nose that prevents me from feeling sympathy for her, so it's time to re-humanise her. I always intended to paint a remote relative of the human race, not a monster!

11 The body and accessories

The face is done, so it's time to paint the rest of the scene. I add fur to the lizard so that he contrasts with his mistress. His colour has to be different, yet not too much, to distract attention from the main character. In spite of their big size, its eyes have to remain low-key for the same reasons. At the same time, I refine the orange fur and ornamental feather with my smallest Pastel brush, hair by hair.

12 The tattoos

I've always been fascinated by body painting and Maori tattoos are a great source of inspiration. I simply draw them with a black basic brush on a layer at 30 per cent Opacity. I soften their edges with a slight Gaussian Blur – the only filter I use in this workshop.

13 Adjust the final colour scheme

Although the global harmony of the scene is correct, it can definitely be improved upon by some subtle adjustments that'll give the viewer the impression that they're looking at an old painting. The colour scheme has to be restrained and warmed for that. First I add a brown layer at 30 per cent Opacity that's blended in Color mode first, and then apply a yellow tint on the blue skin of the creature in Overlay mode. On a Normal extra layer, I reinforce the brightest parts with a slight airbrush white stroke, to give the impression that an atmosphere diffuses the light.
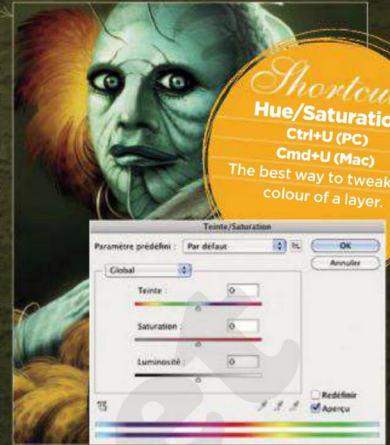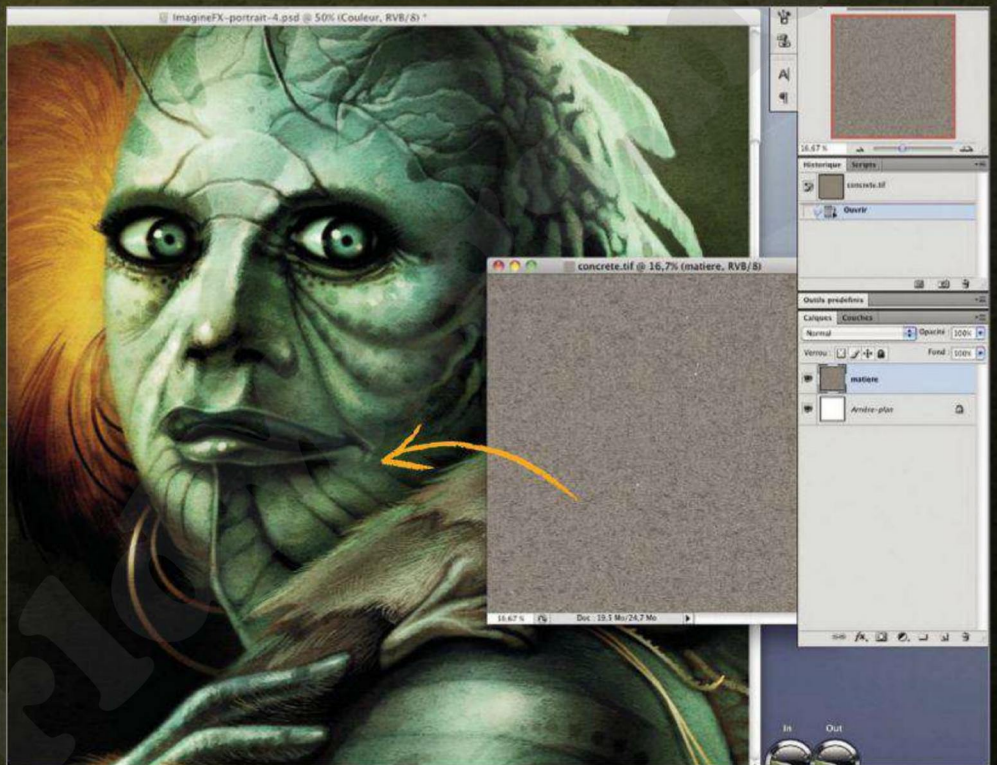
14 Adding a texture

Traditional painters rarely paint on a perfectly smooth glass surface like digital artists, so we Photoshoppers have to pull a slight trick. No need to use a brash wood or material texture – a subtle concrete texture in Overlay mode at 30 per cent Opacity will do the job.

15 The final result

It's finally finished. Although before I really consider an image to be done, I forget about it for a few days, before revisiting it. That's the best way to gain a more objective look at your own work. I hope this workshop will give you some new ideas, and help you to find your own way to paint. Generally speaking, it's the range of different approaches that makes the world of art so rich.

FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX
Reviews

The latest digital art resources are put to the test by the ImagineFX team…

15 PRODUCTS ON TEST

RATINGS EXPLAINED Magnificent Good Ordinary Poor Atrocious

Buying digital magazines, books, MP3 and videos on the Kindle Fire is incredibly easy, and soon you'll be able to get hold of ImagineFX, too!

The Fire will find its way to the UK and beyond when these countries get the Amazon cloud music service, streaming video player and Android app store.

Kindle Fire

NEW FLAME Amazon releases the hottest budget Android tablet yet, but is its screen too small for artists?

Price $199 **Company** Amazon **Web** www.amazon.com/kindlefire **Contact** Via website

Inspiration can strike in the funniest of places – and it's rarely just when you happen to be sitting in front of high-def monitors and a graphics pad. Tablet computers enable you to sketch out ideas, edit files or merely doodle randomly, whether you're flying on an aeroplane or waiting for a bus.

Amazon's first all-colour Kindle is definitely aimed at the public transportation crowd. Costing just $199 in the US (UK price TBC), the Kindle Fire is less than half the price of the cheapest iPad and has already taken a serious bite out of Apple's market share. It's likely to launch in the UK later this year – but is it worth the wait?

While the all-black Fire lacks the iPad's metallic flair, it's eminently practical. A soft-touch rubberised back minimises slippages, the screen is bright and colourful, and build quality is extremely solid (read: chunky).

The seven-inch screen has the same vertical resolution as the iPad 2 and its letterboxed format means it's less than 4cm shorter. It's great for movies and web browsing in landscape, but is a thin experience in portrait mode –

although perfect as a comic reader. However, the size means it's more suited to quick sketching than the kind of plein air painting currently attracting artists to the iPad.

The touchscreen feels smooth and natural, while the homescreen is a simple carousel of recently opened items, enabling you to spin through them with a fluid 3D motion. Tabs for Newsstand, Books, Music, Video, Docs, App and Web are at the top.

The screen is on the small side for many magazines, but works out fine for

> ❝ **It's hard to argue with the Fire's price, its ease of use and its friendly pick-up-and-play interface** ❞

navigating music options and is perfect for video. Films and TV programmes can be downloaded or streamed, and look fantastic. Unfortunately, tinny speakers mean they don't sound as good as they should.

Strangely, the Kindle book-reading app is rather basic, lacking the new X-Ray feature found on the Kindle Touch in the US. It's worth noting that Amazon's new cloud-based Silk web browser is slower than the iPad 2 and Samsung's Galaxy.

There are some decent painting app options available. SketchBook Mobile Express from Autodesk is an excellent drawing app with 47 brushes, customisable palettes and up to three scalable, rotatable layers. Photos can be imported for editing and your work can be saved as Photoshop files.

It's easy to find fault. The Fire lacks GPS, webcam, Bluetooth, a mic and occasionally comes across as a high-tech advert for Amazon. But it's hard to argue with the price, ease of use and its friendly pick-up-and-play interface. ●
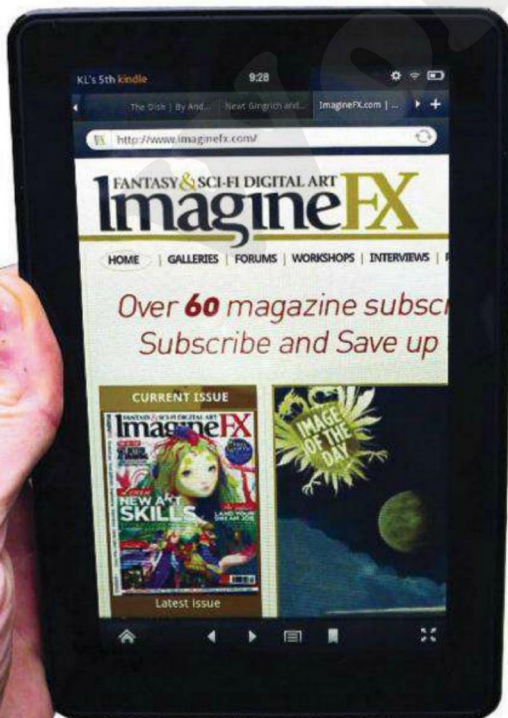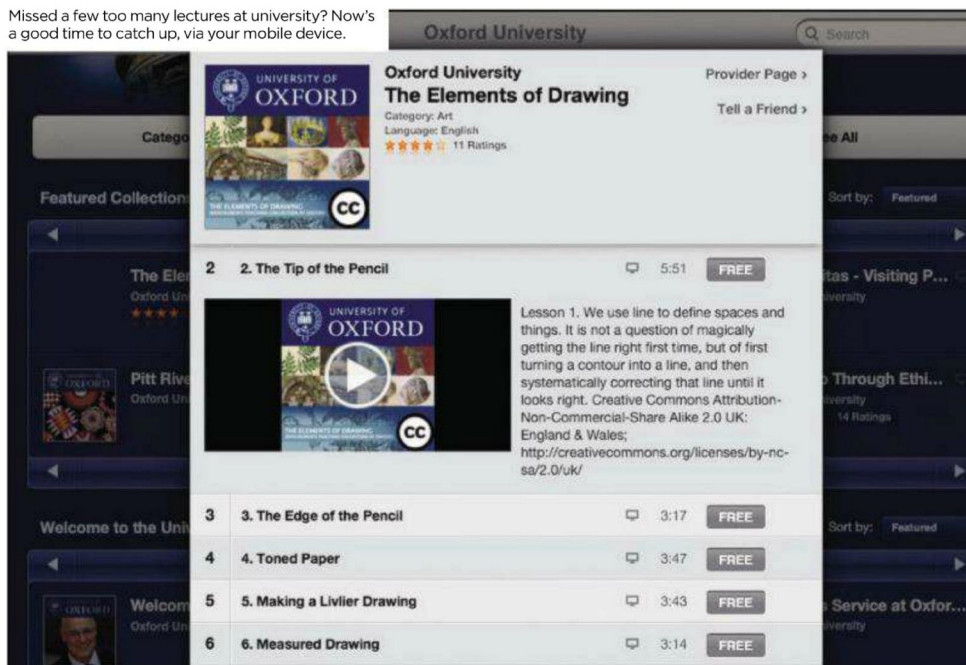
DETAILS

Features
- Android 2.3 OS
- Amazon skin
- 1GHz dual-core TI OMAP processor
- Seven-inch multi-touch LCD
- 1,024x600 resolution
- 8GB memory (6GB usable)
- Wi-Fi b/g/n, USB
- Up to 7.5 hours battery life
- Four hours charge time
- Size: 190x120x11.4mm; Weight: 413g

Rating

KINDLE FIRE VS APPLE iPAD

Comparing the Fire to the iPad is like putting a Mini up against a Lamborghini. Sure, the iPad will trounce the Fire at anything challenging – games can be jerky on the Fire, it runs out of steam hours before the iPad and there's little in the way of premium features. But if all you want to do is the digital equivalent of cruising to the shops and back, the Fire takes the chequered flag. It has a serviceable web browser, handles most Android apps with ease and with the support of Autodesk it's attractive to digital artists looking for an affordable iPad alternative. Some will always head to Apple, but the Fire is just as good for browsing images, basic editing and off-the-cuff sketches. It'll also leave your bank account significantly healthier.

KINDLE FIRE VS SAMSUNG GALAXY

Closer in comparison to Apple's iPad, the Samsung Galaxy tablet is one of the better Android alternatives on the market. Like the iPad, its strengths come from its fuller functionality, which includes built-in cameras, better sound, more storage and a microSD card slot. The big plus, however, is Samsung Galaxy's use of the Android Market for its Apps, which means there's a greater variety of digital art software available, including Adobe's Touch series. But the Kindle Fire has better quality control of its App content, has enough power to offer solid sketching options and is less than half the price, making Amazon's device an affordable, if workmanlike, alternative.

Missed a few too many lectures at university? Now's a good time to catch up, via your mobile device.

Artifact's Simple Mode guides you through the process of creating your montage.

Artifact

EMERGING Merge photos or paint pictures with this montage app

Price £1.49
Developer Kirill Edelman
Web Via iTunes Store

RATING ✎✎✎

Artifact's developer describes it as 'Clone Stamp tool on steroids'. In reality it's more like Quick Masks meets Finger Painting – but that doesn't sound quite as exciting.

Artifact is a photo-montage app where you paint together two of your photos, as you would in Photoshop using a Quick Mask or Alpha Channel. It's easy to get to grips with via its Simple Mode, which takes you through the process with a very basic five-step walkthrough and a simple scrolling tool palette. However, it lacks any real functionality at this stage – you can't even change brush size. Switching over to Expert Mode there are more editing options for your brushes, although they're still quite basic: size, opacity and softness. There's also a tool bar that appears to offer more functionality, but it's not much more than in Simple Mode.
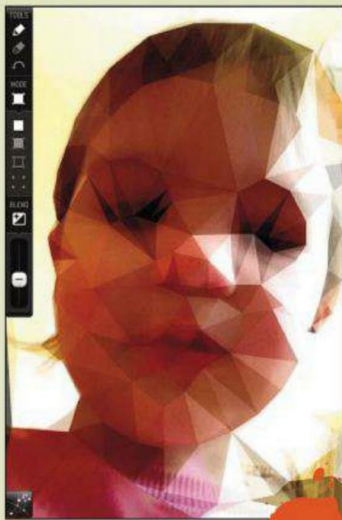
Unfortunately, neither option offers the finesse and accuracy you might expect from an app like this and with only one editable layer available at a time and no option to save an in-progress version (even temporarily), Artifact can be a frustrating and limited experience.

Expert Mode enables more editing options, such as changing brush shape and softness.

iTunes U

iSTUDY Get an Oxbridge education on your iPad or iPhone without having to pass an entrance exam

iPad, iPhone & iPod

Price Free **Company** Apple **Web** Via iTunes **Contact** See website

Apple's iTunes U service has been available since 2007 via iTunes. But this new app version brings it to the homepage of your iPad or iPhone and is given the same emphasis – and wooden bookshelf design – as Apple's magazine and books apps, Newsstand and iBooks.

Packed full of fine art and design courses from some of the world's top universities (from Oxford and Cambridge in the UK, to the California College of the Arts in the US) available to choose from, iTunes U enables you to subscribe and download all or part of any higher education course uploaded to the catalogue. Whether you're interested in Chinese art history or looking to develop your basic drawing and painting lessons, there's something on here for you.

You can download individual video lectures and audio podcasts, or subscribe to existing courses that are updated regularly. Push notifications will let you know when new content is available and existing content is synched automatically across your Apple devices thanks to iCloud.

Although the quality and relevance of course material can vary depending on the individual institutions involved, as it becomes more of a viable option, the quality and diversity of content can only improve. There are currently more than 100 universities on iTunes U and with the popularity of tablets growing among a new generation of students then it will surely only increase. This is especially true when used in conjunction with Apple's new iBooks Author app, which potentially makes it even easier to create course textbooks.

As a free resource this has the potential to be invaluable to anyone looking to broaden their knowledge of the world of art and design.

The iTunes U app allows you to study high-quality course content and the iBooks Author app means the idea has the potential to really take off.

DETAILS

Features
■ Download video lectures or audio podcasts of lessons
■ Store content in easy-to-navigate bookshelf
■ Massive range of art courses available
■ Video prospectuses from colleges
■ Sync across all your Apple devices via iCloud
■ Subscribe to courses with regularly updated content
■ New content added regularly

System Requirements
iPad, iPod touch or iPhone. Requires iOS 5 or later

Rating
✎✎✎✎

Create geometric patterns by placing points on areas of strong colour, shadows or highlights.

Poly

SNAP HAPPY Turn your photos into geometric masterpieces

Price £0.69
Company INNOIZ
Web www.innoiz.com
RATING ✍✍✍✍

Poly enables you to create stunning geometric art from the photos on your iPad. Simply draw points on your picture, which connect together and turn into polygons of solid colour based on the image below. It works best with photos which have high contrast – simple images with strong shapes.

The learning curve for creating stunning images can be quite steep, though – drawing the points can be somewhat fiddly and unpredictable. Fortunately the interface is stripped down and unobtrusive, offering you the bare minimum of functionality – there are three drawing tools (Pencil, Eraser and Undo), three view modes (Polygons, Anchor Points or Wire-Frame) and a simple blend mode that enables you to see more or less of your original image behind the polygons.

This simplicity means it lacks some features, such as a zoom tool, and also a way to edit the position of your points once they have been placed. As a result this can give the process something of a haphazard feel. However, once mastered, Poly really lets you unleash your creativity.

Layers Pro for iPad ● iPad

TURNING PRO The ability to export your iPad paintings as layered PSDs is finally here, but is it up to scratch?

Price £3.99 **Company** J Benjamin Gotow **Web** gotow.net **Contact** bengotow@gmail.com
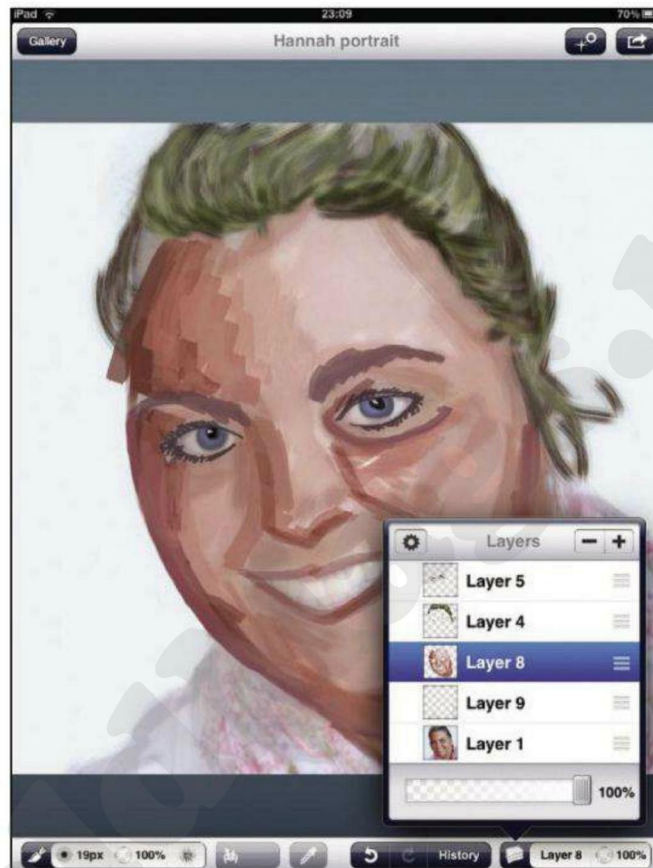
Canvas sizes are limited to 1,024x768 and square 1,024x1,024 and there are no landscape options apart from stretched versions of portrait.
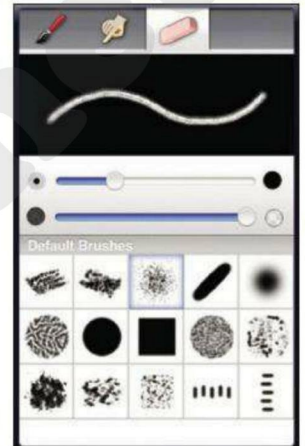
Layers Pro has a basic selection of brushes – Size, Opacity and 15 presets – but there are no natural media brushes to truly craft your paintings with.

A s you can guess from its name, Layers' unique selling point is its ability to handle layers. Available on iPad for the first time, Layers was the first iPhone painting app that made it possible to export finished artwork to a Mac and PC as a layered Photoshop file. Unfortunately though, it's there that Layers' uniqueness ends.

In a market where Brushes and ArtRage lead the way for both quality and affordability, Layers is somewhat limited in comparison. It has a basic selection of brushes with limited edit ability – Size, Opacity and 15 presets – and there are no natural media brushes to truly craft your paintings with. When working on an image the Zoom mode features a double tap option to zoom in that, although useful in principle, can cause your picture to lurch into a new magnification unexpectedly.

Fortunately, there's an Undo function and History palette with 30 undos for remedying this. Canvas sizes are limited to portrait 1,024x768 and square 1,024x1,024; and there are no landscape options, apart from an unpalatable stretched version of your portrait painting.

When looked at in detail, Layers' USP of layers is also limited. With only five editable layers available at a time (due to 'technical limitations') and with no layer effects, it makes the app restrictive when it comes to creating complex images with multiple layers and somewhat defeats the point of being able to export the layered files at the end.

With novelties like a Photo Importer for creating a background and a replay mode to watch how your painting progresses, Layers may well be more of a gimmick rather than a serious art tool, which is a shame. ●

DETAILS

Features
■ Export files as layered PSDs
■ Smudge tool for blending colours together
■ Eye dropper for accurate colour representation
■ Editable brush offset tool (Pro Edition only)
■ History palette enables up to 30 undos
■ Import photos to use as source material or part of the image
■ Share images online with integrated gallery where you can also download other people's images
■ Replay mode to watch you painting being created
■ Unflattened version saved in gallery format and can be resumed at any time
■ Available in free Lite version

System Requirements
iPad or iPad 2. Requires iOS 3.2 or later

Rating
✍✍✍

Pinxit

THE MIGHTY TOME The work of pop surrealist artist Mark Ryden is catalogued in this larger-than-life book

Author Mark Ryden **Publisher** Taschen **Price** £650 (Collector's edition), £3,500 (Art edition) **Web** www.taschen.com **Available** Now

I t's not often that a book makes you look and feel like a Hobbit, but Mark Ryden's Pinxit does just that. It's a huge book, measuring 37.5x50cm, with a cloth-bound cover and a dyed pink calf skin leather spine. The standard edition will set you back £650, whereas the full leather-covered artist-signed copy costs a whopping £3,500.

It's certainly a novel approach, and Ryden's art works immeasurably well in the large-scale format. Think of it as a series of high-quality prints and the £650 price tag is almost justifiable. Joining the facsimiles of Ryden's paintings are a series of essays from the likes of Yoshimoto Nara, Kristine McKenna and Carlo McCormick, all of which shed light on the artist's style and content.

Ryden's work is haunting and poetic, with a hyper-real, almost Photoshopped feel to the skin tones and eyes, despite the artist only working in oil on canvas. Ryden's themes – fairytale woodlands, Eastern mysticism, American history and porcelain children – work together to produce distinctive images that hover between dreamlike and nightmarish.

'The Gay 90's (sic) Old Tyme Art Show', Ryden's exhibition of selected work, is catalogued here, too. The 90s in question are the 1890s – which was a decadent decade of scandal and frivolity. In her essay on the show, Amanda Erlanson points out that Ryden has taken a kitsch approach to representing the past. Although Ryden's nostalgia could be seen as similar to steampunk's reappropriations of late Victoriana, Ryden's take feels more heartfelt and a lot less spiky.

Erlanson also raises an important point about how we often view the past through rose-tinted spectacles, and how Ryden twists the ancient into the modern. While the characters – particularly Abraham Lincoln's craggily sculpted face – raise the ghosts of America, the big-headed, bug-eyed look of the characters feels very modern and almost comical.

Obviously, the sheer price and size of Pinxit doesn't do it any favours in accessibility – we'd imagine at most one person reading this review will actually buy it. But if you can find a copy in your specialist bookshop then it's well worth a quick browse to see Ryden's incredible paintings in all their epic glory.

You can see more images from Mark Ryden's impressive book here: www.imaginefx.com/mark-ryden.

RATING ✏✏✏✏✏
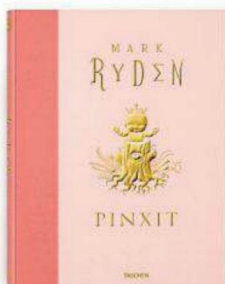
Further reading…

Find out about the earliest character animation and the latest digital effects

Ray Harryhausen's Fantasy Scrapbook

Author Ray Harryhausen and Tony Dalton
Publisher Aurum Press **Price** £30
Available Now
RATING ✏✏✏✏✏
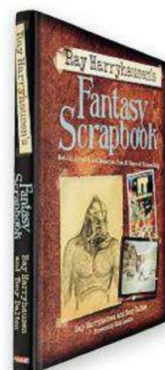
Stop-motion animation genius Ray Harryhausen may be approaching his 92nd birthday, but his influence can still be found in films the world over. This 'scrapbook' was inspired by Ray's friends and family clearing out his garage and the cornucopia of film props they found there.

Although stop-motion may seem a bit of an unlikely match for digital artists, there's a lot of inspiration here, and Harryhausen displays an awareness of character design and animation that's applicable to the digital world. It's lovely to witness the boyish charm of Harryhausen's maquettes, as well as the many behind-the-scenes documents and letters. The scrapbook approach lends a homespun charm to the work of a pioneering craftsman.

Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting in Photoshop

Author Simon Morse et al
Publisher 3DTotal Publishing **Price** £30
Available Now
RATING ✏✏✏✏

Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting in Photoshop is a collection of tutorials from digital artists such as Tomasz Jedrusek, Alex Figini and Nykolai Aleksander. The book begins with the very basics of Photoshop, before moving onto lighting, colour, characters and landscapes. Specifics of composition – such as clouds and sandstorms – are highlighted later on in the book.

Although touted as a book for newcomers, you'll need basic drawing skills and a little talent before you begin working through it. The multiple-author approach inevitably leads to some disparity between the tutorials, so it's best treated as a handy reference tome, rather than a complete resource.

In the video, Donato explains the thinking behind his thumbnails.

Painting Joan of Arc shows the skill that goes into creating an ambitious artwork.

Donato refers to his photo composite (left) while drawing on his art board.

Although Donato uses traditional media, many of his principles apply to digital painting as well.

Painting Joan of Arc

THE MASTER Learn from the best as Donato Giancola offers an in-depth tour of one of his greatest paintings

Publisher Pijjen Media **Price** $50 **Format** DVD **Web** www.pijjenmedia.com

Donato Giancola's first training video The Mechanic, available through the Art Department, stands as one of the finest we've seen. Assured, meticulous and fascinating, it sets the highest possible benchmark for this follow-up, with a different publisher but the same production team behind it.

The good news is that Donato's not about to disappoint anyone. If anything, he's raised the standard even higher. Even the packaging for Painting Joan of Arc bears the stamp of quality craftsmanship, with a print of the finished painting provided alongside the DVD.

Recorded in Donato's Brooklyn studio, the four-hour video takes you through key moments in the creation of an ambitious work. Placing the titular heroine in the midst of a scrum of other characters requires careful planning of physical positioning and lighting if you're to pull it off. Donato starts by looking to other artists to see

how they've dealt with similar challenges, paying attention not just to technical solutions but how those choices can be used to reveal character and deepen meaning.

A series of sketches to explore options leads to a photo-shoot that provides more detailed information about how the figures interact and how the lighting scheme affects them. You're then guided into the heart of the video, as Donato starts painting, sharing techniques that have been passed down to him through his career. Some techniques apply only to the oils Donato's using, but digital artists will learn much as well, particularly in discussions such as the use of chromatic rather than tonal value while painting faces.

Like The Mechanic, Painting Joan of Arc is first-rate training that rewards repeat viewing and opens many avenues of creative exploration. Enough territory is shared between the two videos that you arguably don't need both – but they're so good that you should want both. ●

DETAILS

Topics covered
■ Theme and allegory
■ Preliminary sketches
■ Composition
■ Underpainting
■ Blocking
■ Chromatic values
■ Glazing

Length
260 minutes

Rating
★★★★★

ARTIST PROFILE
DONATO GIANCOLA

Donato has been creating award-winning drawings and oil paintings in the classical realism and science-fiction and fantasy fields for 20 years. His CV lists an impressive number of honours: multiple Gold and Silver awards from Spectrum: The Best in Science Fiction & Fantasy Art, multiple Hugos, multiple Chesleys, and multiple awards from the Society of Illustrators. Donato teaches at the School of Visual Arts and the Illustration Master Class. His paintings can be seen at the Richard J Demato Fine Arts Gallery in Sag Harbor, New York.

www.donatoart.com

Demi-god Theseus dishes out beautifully framed justice while mere mortals look on in stunned silence.

Immortals

PICTURE PERFECT Renaissance art inspires a new take on a Greek legend, with the style dial turned up to 11

Distributor Universal **Certificate** 15 **Price** £15 (Blu-ray, £20) **Available** Now

A retelling of the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur from director Tarsem Singh was always going to look stunning. The India-born director, who trained at Art Center College of Design in California, always delivers evocative, opulent films.

Inspired by Caravaggio, the rebellious Italian Baroque period painter, and determined to set this Greek myth in a fantastical world remote from traditional footprints, Tarsem's version of ancient Greece will inspire and confuse in equal measure. This is a saturated, stylised world lit with an eerie luminosity that spotlights the characters like a descending finger of light. Caravaggio would have been proud. The costume designs from the late Eiko Ishioka, who was just as comfortable showing at the Museum of Modern Art in New York as she was designing for the screen, add to the effect. The result is a brutal,

beautiful fantasy that uses the Greek myth to launch its own, alien world.

Costume and Caravaggio collide in every scene to ensure this is an unusual action movie, which at its heart, it is. The actors stiffly battle through their scenes, seemingly not wanting to damage their elaborate armour or break from the pin-sharp-lit framing. It's theatre mixed with Fight Club, as Henry Cavill's heroic Theseus and Mickey Rourke's bitter King Hyperion are caught up in an enduring battle between the Gods and Titans that's more manga than Minoan fable. Fitting then, that the Blu-ray comes with a digital comic with contributions from Jock, Ben Templesmith and Francesco Francavilla.

Immortals isn't a history lesson but an art lecture, and although Tarsem's approach can feel theatrical at times, it never fails to inspire.

RATING ✍✍✍✍
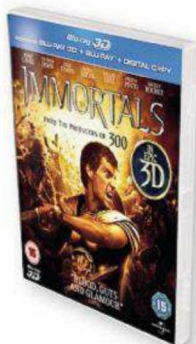
Also look at…

One classic 80s scarefest and one cult 80s horror are brought bang up to date

The Thing
Distributor Universal
Certificate 18
Price £15 (Blu-ray, £20)
Available Now
RATING ✍✍✍✍

An axe embedded in a wall, a frozen corpse and a two-headed beast charred beyond recognition. These moments inspired The Thing, a prequel to John Carpenter's 1982 film of the same name.

We already know the answer to what happened to the Norwegian scientists. The alien got them. This casts Matthijis van Heijningen's film with a sombre ambience as almost everyone in the mostly all-Norwegian cast is going to die. The tease comes from who and how. What follows is a similar blend of paranoia, tension and gut-busting effects that made Carpenter's movie a thrill.

Considering how VFX heavy this release is, the extras lack any insight into the concepts behind the creature. However, a feature exploring the meticulous nature of linking the new film with the moments of inspiration from Carpenter's movie is fascinating. This prequel manages to judge its own mood while still delivering the shocks.

Fright Night
Distributor Disney
Certificate 15
Price £15 (Blu-ray, £20)
Available Now
RATING ✍✍✍✍

The first Fright Night was a self-referential classic, and it's the same with this remake, although Buffy quotes replace B-movie references, and there's a wry poke at Twilight, eBay quality control and misleading iPhone apps. Anton Yelchin is teenager Charlie Brewster, an anti-hero who's more interested in trying to fit in at school than staking vampires. There's an arsenal of weird weapons, a charismatic villain in Colin Farrell's vampire lord, Jerry Danridge, and a climatic fight that floods the screen in fake blood. As with the original, David Tennant steps into Roddy McDowell's shoes and steals the scenes as the jaded Vegas occult-magician and reluctant hero Peter Vincent.

While the extras aim for humour over detail, focusing on Tennant's colourful parody and happily highlighting the movie's many clichés, Fright Night blends humour, action and shocks, proving remakes can have bite. 🔴

Another nameless opponent is horribly despatched by your supernatural powers.

The Darkness II

DARKER, MORE INTENSE The sequel to 2007's comic-based shooter ups the ante in almost every department

Format PC, PS3, Xbox 360 **Publisher** 2K Games **Price** £50
Available Now **Web** www.embracethedarkness.com

Lead environment artist Ron Davey was "sick and tired of doing realistic-looking games", so he and art director Matt Tremblay looked to Marc Silvestri's work on early issues of The Darkness comic, and Alex Maleev's work on Daredevil to create a style they call Graphic Noir.

It's wrong to call it mere cel shading. Cel shading reduces a game's palette to a few colours. Digital Extremes' version of cel shading uses high-resolution textures and a full range of colours to replicate the look of The Darkness on the page, on your TV. Early work on creating the aesthetic with a pure tech solution – dedicated shaders overlaid atop a conventional-looking game – failed, and instead every piece of The Darkness II's art was made by hand.

The art is by far the cleverest part of The Darkness II. It's a simple but enthusiastic shooter which plays like a hundred other games, but never looks or feels like them. The Darkness II is all about treating your senses – pull a trigger and you feel the game's guns explode in your hand, murder your way across New York and Mike Patton-voiced Darkness rasps approval in your ear, stop to look around and every angle looks like a comic book panel writ large.

The Darkness II feels special. The signature look alone was 18 months of work and there's more love in the game than any licensed shoot-'em-up bloodbath ever deserved. The Darkness II looks different, sounds different and feels different, and how often can a shooter say that?

RATING ✎✎✎✎
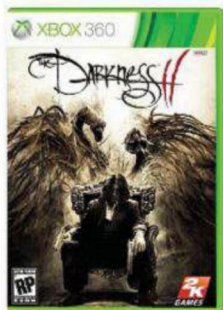
Also look at…

An unashamedly low-brow beat-'em-up and a long-running, overly serious RPG

Soul Calibur V

Format PS3, Xbox 360
Publisher Namco Bandai
Price £50
Available Now
RATING ✎✎✎

Topshop meets sex shop in another round of Soul Calibur V's impractical and titillating character design. Namco's Project Soul team have a background art team, character art team and weapon art team, but it's lead character artist Takuji Kawano who defines Calibur V's look. Kawano's obsession with gloss, exaggerated proportions and the quality of different materials gives the fifth instalment a visual signature unlike any other game.

Together, Kawano and Bayonetta's Mari Shimazaki put Namco's programmers to the test with costumes made of feathers, fur, rock, sheer mesh, steel and more, but the tech team never fails to meet the challenge. With so little to render on-screen the characters can be built from an obscene number of polygons and the backgrounds can be exquisitely detailed. Calibur V's sense of the theatrical is unmatched, even if its sense of sexiness is basic at best and juvenile at worst.

Final Fantasy XIII-2

Format PS3, Xbox 360
Publisher Square Enix
Price £50
Available Now
RATING ✎✎

Final Fantasy's current art director Isamu Kamikokuryo claims there's no definitive Final Fantasy look, but he's wrong. The art directors may come and go, the styles change and the tastes alter, but Final Fantasy remains the same: a succinct blend of RPG development, item management and world exploration packaged in vibrant, hyper-realistic visuals.

Final Fantasy's artists always respect what came before. Nobody has dared to challenge those goofy costume designs and the scale-before-detail world that became standard when Final Fantasy graduated to PlayStation2, even when they misjudged what long-time fans want, as they did with Final Fantasy XIII.

Kamikokuryo's work is no sillier than Kawano's, of course, but Final Fantasy lacks Soul Calibur V's self-awareness and ostentatious showmanship. In more ways than one, it's more of the same. ●

Most mechanical concepts are handled by Peggy, but Robert can't help bringing his character design skills to bear on a task.
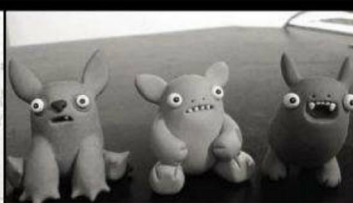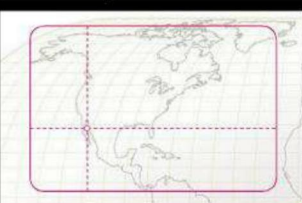
Peggy takes on the studio's vehicle designs, and this hoverbike certainly showcases her attention to detail.

Gadget-Bot

DYNAMIC DUO Discover how two friends met at art college and turned their dream of running their own studio into rock-solid reality

Peggy's focus on mechanical and industrial designs produces some emotive scenes, such as this steampunk-inspired train station.

Being successful can be tough. Raw talent may not be enough to make it in the competitive art industry. The difference between success and failure can often be ambition and the determination to succeed, as well as knowing when to reel in your expectations...

"I remember at the age of seven I declared that I wanted to own Cartoon Network," laughs Gadget-Bot's co-founder Peggy Chung. "So while Cartoon Network isn't my goal anymore, Gadget-Bot is on its way."

Peggy and fellow artist Robert Simons set up Gadget-Bot out of necessity. The pair met at the respected Art Center College of Design in California, and when the contracts came in and the workload piled up, sharing the burden was easier than being buried under it.

Their approach to a new project stems from a need to get under an idea's skin, to "get into the history, how it works," says Robert, adding: "I've noticed the more attention you pay to the details, the more people are drawn to it." Peggy says her approach varies: "Sometimes I get a very simple brief and the client is open to my interpretation of the information given. Other times, the brief given is very specific with image references to go off of, to fulfil the project successfully."

Both artists have their preferred specialities and subjects, says Robert. While Peggy has a knack for vehicle and mechanical design, Robert focuses on environment and character creation. As a result, they have most angles covered, although as Robert says, "We would usually hire a friend for creature designs."
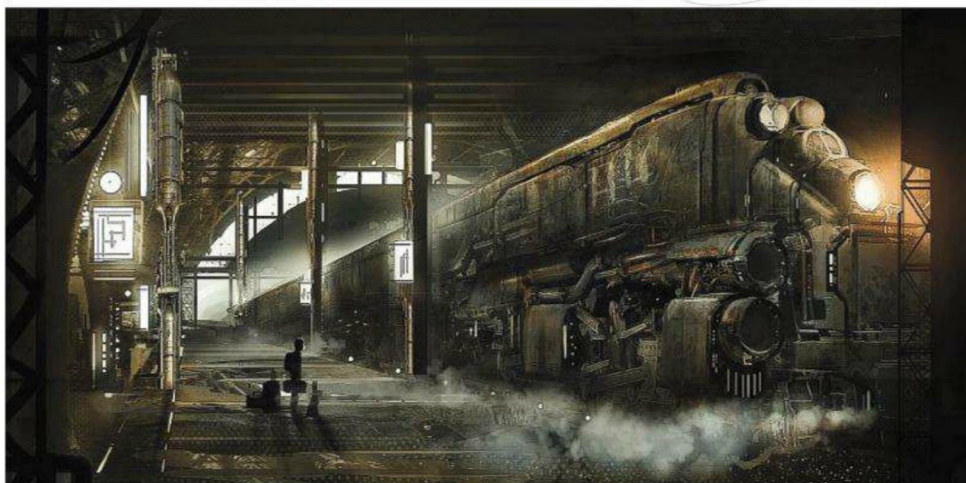
PEGGY CHUNG

Peggy talks about the challenge of setting up a new business

PROJECTS The Thing, T-Mobile 4G Winter Wonderland commercial

How did your education and training prepare you as a professional artist?
Being trained at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, I learned to stay on my toes when it comes to work. Working professionally, you can get a range of things asked of you to illustrate in a short amount of time. My education at Art Center taught me how to produce work with quality and speed.

Where and how does Gadget-Bot fit into a project's pipeline?
We take words, notes and or references and produce a visual representation of what the client wants. Our 2D work could be the final piece of the job if it were, say, a movie pitch. However, if the images were needed for a commercial or advert, then our work is then passed onto 3D modellers to flesh out.

How have you found balancing the art side with the business side of running a studio?
I've learned that if you aren't good or versed in something, ask for help! I consult my accountant on the money side of things as well as other concept artist professionals on contracts and legalities. Making sure the business part is running smoothly first, enables me then to focus on the art.

What skills do you need to set up your own studio?
If you have passion, you have drive, and when you have drive, you do whatever it takes to meet your goal. If your goal is creating your own studio, you have to research, ask questions, stay organised and team up with people that contribute and support to your goal.

What's the secret to signing up new clients?
Professionalism and quality work created for your current clients. This allows for recommendations from the clients when a friend of theirs is in need of an artist.

Peggy is the co-founder of Gadget-Bot and a recent graduate from the Art Center College of Design in California.

www.pegchung.com
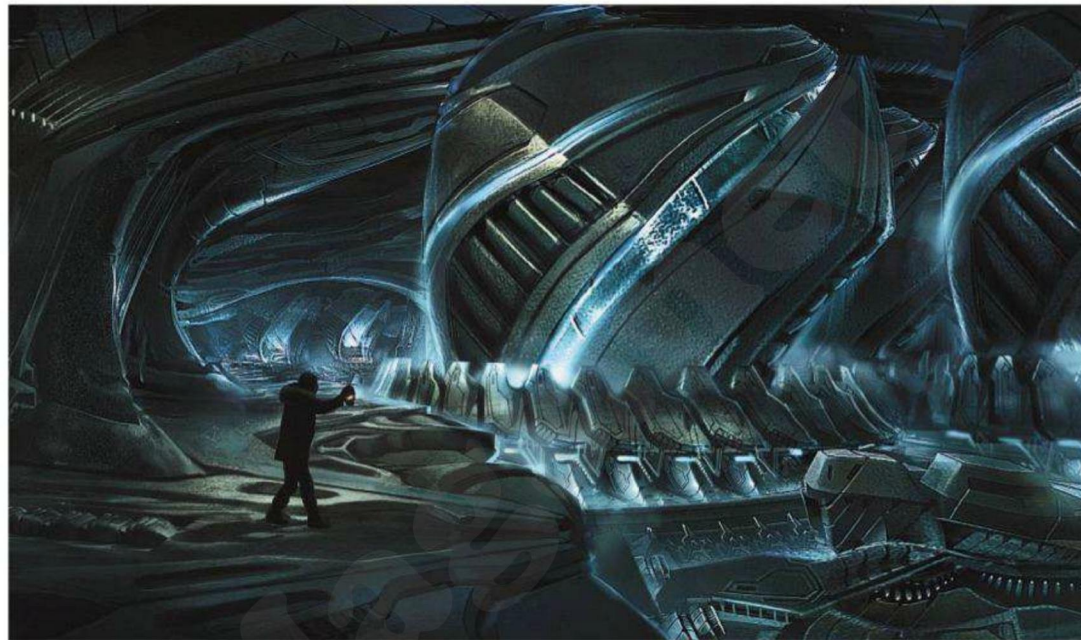
Flexibility is key to Gadget-Bot's long-term success. "Our goal over the next few years is to grow Gadget-Bot into a production studio capable of handling a project from beginning to recent months and have been pitching them. "It's going to take a while before our own projects launch off, but it's fun to experiment and try new things," says Robert.

Robert's contributions to the designs for the spacecraft from The Thing prequel needed to be modern, but also reference the original John Carpenter movie.

> ❝ **It's going to take a while before our own projects launch off, but it's fun to experiment and try new things** ❞

end," says Robert. "Peggy and I would be able to oversee the concepts and modelling work, and then bring on more people to help fill the gaps."

The pair aims to be as client focused as possible, "because you're a brand and you want to make sure your customers are happy," says Robert. It has a unique impact on the work being created too, with Peggy acknowledging she likes to get out of the studio. "The benefit from doing on-location work is getting feedback quickly from the client."

Beyond client-focused commissions and projects, the duo hopes to develop Gadget-Bot into a movie production studio. "Robert and I both have a passion for entertainment and we feel that we want to be the catalysts for our own intellectual properties to be produced," says Peggy. They've been busy working on their own intellectual projects in

Ultimately Gadget-Bot is a partnership that feeds of Robert and Peggy's chemistry. "We both know each other very well and when one of us is stressing out, the other is there to help keep things going," says Robert. "Really, I'm the one that stresses and she keeps me going!" ●

Peggy's BountyBot concept illustrates her adaptation of animal forms into her mech designs

FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX You Tube

Just a few of the brilliant artist videos that
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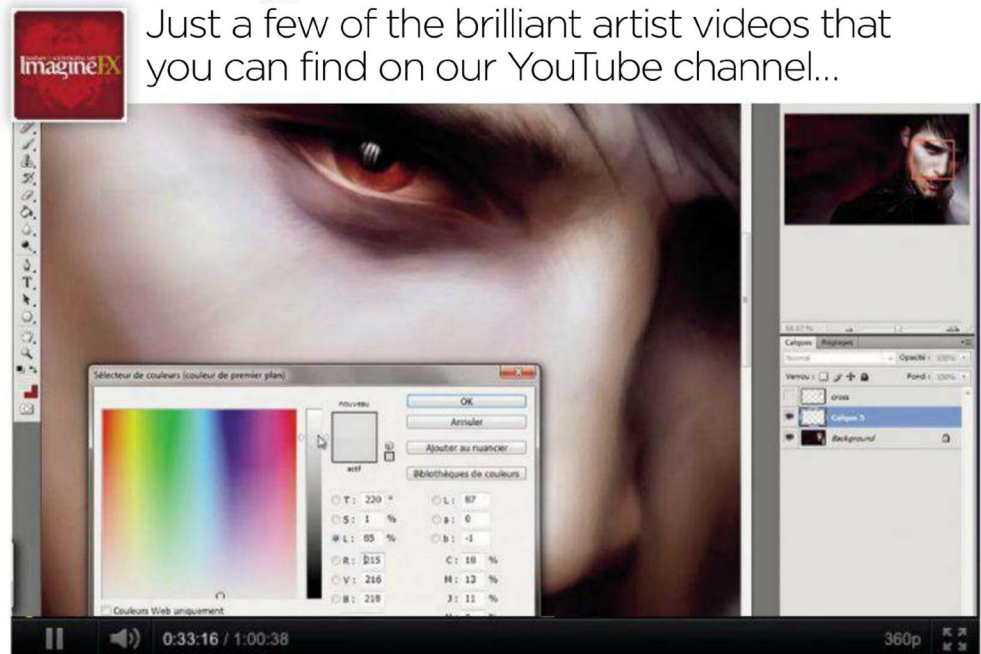
Paint a vampire in Photoshop

French artist Mélanie Delon shares her process of creating a hauntingly
beautiful male creature of the night. Watch the video at **www.bit.ly/mdelon**.

Environments

See how Mike McCain creates a dramatic sci-fi
landscape at **www.bit.ly/mikemccain**.

Realistic females

Marta Dahlig explains how she paints a real
fantasy woman at **www.bit.ly/mdahlig**.

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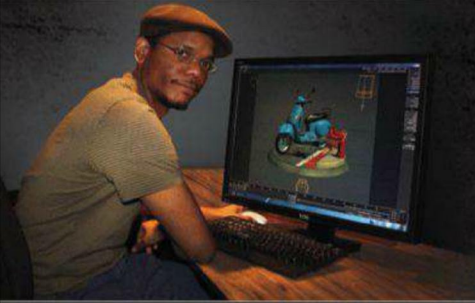Upload your portfolio today for free and share your artwork with thousands of professional and amateur artists…

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